NAVAL OCCASIONS

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and Some Traits of the Sailor-man

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Naval Occasions

and

Some Traits of the Sailor-man

BY
”BARTIMEUS”

”... Relating to ... the Navy, whereon, under the good Providence of God, the wealth, safety, and strength of the kingdom chiefly depend.”—*Articles of War.*

”... A safeguard unto our most gracious Sovereign Lord ... and his Dominions, and a security for such as pass on the seas upon their lawful occasions.”—*The Book of Common Prayer.*

FOURTEENTH IMPRESSION

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TO
MY MOTHER

PREFACE.

”I reckon that’s proper ’New Navy,’” said the coxswain of a duty cutter to the midshipman perched on the ”dickey” seat beside him in the stern.

It was 6 A.M.: the boat was returning from the early morning beef trip, and the midshipman in charge of her had seen fit to discuss with his coxswain the subject which at most hours, and particularly at this one, lay nearest to his heart—the subject of Food.

"Proper 'New Navy,'" repeated the petty officer with contempt. He referred to the recent introduction of marmalade into his scale of rations. He spoke bitterly, yet his quarrel was not with the marmalade, which, in its way, was all that marmalade should have been. His regret was for the "dear dead days" before marmalade was thought of on the Lower-deck.

That was ten years ago, but fondness for the ancient order of things is still a feature of this Navy of ours. There was never a ship like our last ship: no commission like the one before this one. Gipsies all: yet we would fain linger a little by the ashes of our camp-fire while the caravans move on.

The most indifferent observer of naval affairs during the last decade will admit that it has been one of immense transition. Changes, more momentous even than this business of the marmalade, have followed in the wake of a great wave of progress. "Up and onward" is the accepted order, but at the bottom of the Sailor-man's conservative heart a certain reluctance still remains. The talk of smoking-room and forecastle concerns the doings of yesterday; the ties that link us in a "common brotherhood" were for the most part forged in the "Old" Navy, so fast yielding place to new.

In 'Naval Occasions' the Author has strung together a few sketches of naval life afloat in the past ten years. They relate to ships mainly of the "pre-Dreadnought" era, and officers (those of the Military branch at least) who owe their early training to the old *Britannia*. At the same time, for all the outward changes, the inner work-a-day life of the Fleet remains unaltered. With this, and not in criticism of things old or new, these Sketches are concerned. Pathos and humour continue to rub elbows on either side of us much as they always have, and there still remains more to laugh about than sigh over when the day's work is done.

DEVONPORT, 1914

NOTE.

With the exception of "A Committee of Supply," "That which Remained," "A Galley's Day," "C/o G.P.O.," "Watch there, Watch!" "A One-Gun Salute," "The Greater Love," "A Picturesque Ceremony," and "Why the Gunner went Ashore," the following Naval Sketches were published originally in 'The Pall Mall Gazette.'

The first three exceptions appeared in 'The Illustrated Sporting and Dramatic News,' 'The Magpie,' and 'The Naval and Military Record' respectively. The remainder have not before appeared in print.

The Author's best thanks are due to the Editors of the above Journal and Periodicals for their ready permission to reproduce these Sketches.

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NAVAL OCCASIONS.

I.

”D. S. B.”[#]

[#] Duty Steam Boat.

”The songs of Greece, the pomp of Rome,
Were clean forgot at seventeen.
Oh Lord! At seventeen!”
—G. STEWART BOWLES.

The Midshipman of the Second Picket Boat—that is to say, the boat with the bell-mouthed funnel of burnished brass and vermilion paint inside her cowls—was

standing under the electric light at the battery door reading the Commander's night order-book.

"Second Picket Boat to have steam by 5 A.M., and will perform duties of D.S.B. for the Second Division." He closed the book and stood meditatively looking out into the darkness beyond the quarter-deck rails. It was blowing fitfully, gusts of wind shaking the awning in a manner that threatened dirty weather on the morrow. "Why the deuce couldn't the other Picket boat...? But she hadn't got a brass funnel—only a skimpy painted affair. Decidedly it was the fatal beauty of his boat that had influenced the Commander's decision. Still..." He yawned drearily, and opening the deck log, ran his finger down the barometer readings. "Glass low—beastly low—and steady. Wind 4-5, o.c.q.r. H'm'm." The cryptic quotations did not appear to add joy to the outlook. Ten o'clock had struck, and forward in the waist the boatswain's mate was "piping down," the shrill cadence of his pipe floating aft on the wind. Sorrowfully the Midshipman descended to the steerage flat, and crouching beneath the hammocks that hung from the overhead beams, reached his chest and noiselessly undressed,—noiselessly, because the sleeping occupant of the adjacent hammock had the morning watch, and was prone to be unreasonable when accidentally awakened.

In rather less than a minute he had undressed and donned his pyjamas; then, delving amid the mysterious contents of his sea-chest, produced a pair of sea-boots, an oilskin and sou'wester and a sweater. He made his preparations mechanically, propping the sea-boots where they would be handiest when he turned out. Lastly, he hung his cap over a police-light, because he knew from experience that the light caught his eyes when he was in his hammock, locked his chest, and, choosing a spot where two mess-mates (who were scuffling for the possession of a hammock-stretcher) would not fall over his feet, he unconcernedly knelt down and said his prayers. The corporal of the watch passed on his rounds: the sentry clicked to attention an instant, and resumed his beat: above his head the ward-room door opened to admit a new-comer, and the jangle of a piano drifted down the hatchway; then the door closed again, shutting out the sound, and the kneeling figure, in rather dilapidated pyjamas, rose to his feet. Steadying himself by a ringbolt overhead, he swung lightly into his hammock and wriggled down between the blankets. From the other side of the flat came a voice—

"Freckles, you're D.S.B. to-morrow."

The Midshipman of the Second Picket Boat grunted in reply and pulled the blanket close under his chin. Presently the voice sounded again—

"Freckles, dear, aren't you glad you sold your little farm and came to sea?"

But he who had sold a farm only snuggled his face against the pillow, sighed once, and was asleep.

Had you seen the sleeper in waking hours, nursing a cutter close-reefed through a squall, or handling a launch-load of uproarious liberty-men, you might, passing by at this moment, have found food for meditation. For the vibration of the dynamo a deck below presently caused the cap to fall from the police-light it had shielded, and the glare shone full in a face which (for all the valiant razor locked away in its owner's chest) was that of a very tired child.

* * * * *

"Orders for the Picket Boat, sir?"

The Officer of the Morning Watch, who was staring through his binoculars into the darkness, turned and glanced at the small figure muffled in oilskins at his side. Many people would have smiled in something between amusement and compassion at the earnest tone of inquiry. But this is a trade in which men get out of the way of smiling at 5 A.M.—besides, he'd been through it all himself.

"Flagship's signalled some empty coal-lighters broken adrift up to windward—cruisin' independently. Go an' round 'em up before they drift down on the Fleet. Better man your boat from the boom and shove straight off. Smack it about!"

The small figure in oilskins—who, as a matter of fact, was none other than the Midshipman of the Second Picket Boat, brass funnel, vermilion-painted cowls and all—turned and scampered forward. It was pitch dark, and the wind that swept in rainy gusts along the battery caught the flaps of his oilskins and buffeted the sleep out of him. Overside the lights of the Fleet blinked in an indeterminate confusion through the rain, and for an instant a feeling of utter schoolboy woe, of longing for the security of his snug hammock, filled his being. Then the short years of his training told. Somewhere ahead, in that welter of rain and darkness, there was work to be done—to be accomplished, moreover, swiftly and well. It was an order.

Stumbling on to the forecastle, he slipped a life-belt over his shoulders, climbed the rail, and descended the ship's side by a steel ladder, until he reached the lower boom. It jutted out into the darkness, a round, dimly-discerned spar, and secured to it by a boat-rope at the farthest point of his vision, he saw his boat. The circular funnel-mouth ringed a smoky glow, and in the green glare of a side-light one of the bowmen was reaching for the ladder that hung from the boom. Very cautiously he felt his way out along it steadied by a man-rope, breast high. Looking downward, he saw the steamboat fretting like a dog in leash; the next instant she was lurching forward on the crest of a wave and as suddenly dropped away again in a shower of spray. Releasing his grip with one hand he slipped astride of the boom, wriggled on his stomach till his feet touched rungs

of a Jacob's ladder, and so hung in a few feet above the tumbling water.

"'Arf a mo', sir," said a deep voice behind him. The boat's bows were plunging just below ... the ladder tautened with a jerk.

"Now, sir!" said the voice. He relaxed his hold and dropped nimbly on to the triangular space in the bows. As he landed, the Jacob's ladder shot upwards into the darkness, as though snatched by an unseen hand.

Steadying himself by the rail along the engine-room casing he hurried to the wheel. A bearded petty officer moved aside as he came aft. This was his Coxswain, a morose man about the age of his father, who obeyed orders like an automaton, and had once (mellowed by strong waters) been known to smile.

"Cast off forward!" The engine-room bell rang twice, and the Midshipman gave a quick turn to the wheel. For an instant the boat plunged as if in uncertainty, then swung round on the slope of a slate-grey wave and slid off on her quest. Forward in the bows the bowmen were crouched, peering through the rain. Presently one of them hailed hoarsely.

"Port a bit, sir," supplemented the Coxswain. "That's them, there!" He pointed ahead to where indistinct shapes showed black against the troubled waters. The bell rang again in the tiny engine-room, and the Leading Stoker, scenting adventures, threw up the hatch and thrust a head and hairy chest into the cold air. His interest in the proceedings apparently soon waned, however, for he shut the hatch down again and busied himself mysteriously—always within reach of the throttle and reversing-lever—with an oil-can.

Going very slow, the boat crept alongside the foremost lighter, a huge derelict that, when loaded, carried fifty tons of coal. They had been moored alongside one another to the wharf, but, rocking in the swell, had chafed through their moorings and broken adrift.

Now to take in tow an unwieldy lighter in the dark with a heavy swell running, and to moor it safely in the spot whence it came, is a piece of work that requires no small judgment. However, one by one, the three truants were captured and secured, and then, with the grey dawn of a winter morning breaking overhead, the picket boat swung round on her return journey. On the way she passed another boat racing shoreward for the mails. The Midshipman at the wheel raised his hand with a little gesture of salutation, and she went by in a shower of spray.

Half an hour later the Midshipman of the Second Picket Boat, garbed in the "rig of the day," was ladling sugar over his porridge with the abandon of one who is seventeen and master of his fate. A messenger appeared at the gunroom door—

"Duty Steam Boat's called away, sir."

Her Midshipman locked away his pet marmalade-pot (for there are limits

even to the communism of a gunroom) and reached for his cap and dirk. ”We ain’t got much money,” he observed grimly, ”but we *do* see life!”

II.
CAPTAIN’S DEFAULTERS.

At the last stroke of six bells in the Forenoon Watch the Marine bugler drew himself up stiffly, as one on whom great issues hung, and raising his bugle sent the imperious summons echoing along the upper deck. Clattering forward along the battery he halted at the break of the forecastle and repeated the blast; then, shaking the moisture from the instrument, he wiped his mouth on the back of his hand and strutted aft. He had sounded ”Captain’s Defaulters.”

An Able Seaman burnishing a search-light on the boat-deck heard the strident bugle-call and winced. Hurriedly he replaced his cleaning rags, and with a moistened forefinger and thumb adjusted a dank curl that peeped beneath his cap. He shared the belief, not uncommon among sailor-men, that the Captain’s judgment at the defaulter-table is duly swayed by the personal appearance of the delinquent. Eyeing his inverted reflection in the big concave mirror, he screwed his face into an expression of piteous appeal, and, cap in hand, repeated several times in varying notes of regretful surprise: ”I ’adn’t ’ad no more’n a drop, sir, w’en I come over all dizzy.” The rehearsal concluded, he flung himself pell-mell down the ladder. On the way he met a messmate ascending, who remonstrated in the brusque parlance of the tar.

”In the bloomin’ rattle, I am,” explained the disturber of traffic.

”Wha’s up, then?”

The other made a little upward gesture with his elbow and gave a laugh of pleasant retrospection. ”’Strewth!” he supplemented. ”Wasn’t ’arf blind, neither,” implying that when last ashore he had looked upon the cup when it was very ruddy indeed.

At the screen door to the quarter-deck he overtook a companion in misfortune *en route* to ”toe pitch.” This was a frightened Second-class Stoker, harried aft by one of the Ship’s Police at the shambling gait officially recognised as the ”steady double.” Together they saluted and stepped on to the quarter-deck, where, already standing between his escort, a sullen-eyed deserter, captured the previous day, scowled into vacancy. The new-comers took their places in the

melancholy line, stood easy, and commenced to preen themselves furtively, after the manner of sailors about to come under the direct eye of authority. Then the Captain's Clerk arrived with a bundle of papers in his hand.

"All ready, Master-at-Arms?"

"All ready, sir." The iron-visaged Chief of Police saluted and went to report to the Commander. The Commander ran his eye over the defaulter-sheet and, entering the Captain's cabin, disappeared from view. For a minute a hush settled over the group as silently they awaited the coming of the man who, to them, represented all that was Omnipotent upon earth. The breeze led the shadow of the White Ensign a fantastic dance across the spotless planking, and rustled the papers on the baize-covered table. Overhead a gull soared, screaming at intervals, and then swooped suddenly to the water. The owner of the cherished curl, who was what is technically known in the Service as a "bird," sucked his teeth thoughtfully and speculated as to the probable extent of his punishment. The Second-class Stoker fallen-in beside him, who had broken his leave twenty-four hours, and apparently expected to be executed, suddenly sniffled and was reproved in an undertone by the Master-at-Arms. "'*Old* yer row!" said that dignitary. Then, raising his voice, he shouted, "'Faulters, 'Shun!"

The Captain's Clerk, who had been abstractedly watching the sea-gull's antics and thinking about trout-fishing, came to earth with a start: the waiting group stiffened to attention and saluted. The Captain walked to the table and picked up the charge-sheet.

'"Erbert 'Awkins!" snapped the Master-at-Arms. "Off cap. Absenover leave twenty-four hours, sir."

The Second-class Stoker stepped forward; it was his first offence in the Service, and the Adam's-apple in his throat worked like a piston. Suddenly recollecting, he snatched off his cap and stood, moistening dry lips.

"How long has this man been in the Service?" asked the Captain, grave eyes on the delinquent's face.

"Four months, sir," replied his Clerk.

Then to the culprit: "Why did you break your leave?" The lad shook his head in obstinate silence. As a matter of fact, he had broken it because a glib-tongued slut ashore kept him too drunk to return till he was penniless. But what was the use of telling all that to a Being with four gold rings on his sleeve, and grey eyes like gimlets in the shadow of the cap-peak. He wouldn't understand how desperately bad the liquor had been, and the way the women talked...

"Why did you break your leave?" The voice was neither harsh nor impatient. Its tone merely implied that the speaker not only wanted an answer but meant to have one. Rather a kind voice for a Captain. Queer little wrinkles he had round the corners of his mouth and eyes ... made a bloke look wise-like ... as

though after all ... Lord! How his head ached.... Steady eyes those were...

"It's like this 'ere, sir——" The gates of sulky reserve opened suddenly and without warning: in a flood of words came the sorry explanation, sordid, incoherent, clothed in half-learned *patois* of the lower deck. But the figure in the gold-peaked cap seemed to accept it, such as it was, for presently he nodded dismissal.

"Cautioned," he said curtly.

With a click of the heels, the escort and their prisoner wheeled before the table. The Commander made a brief report, and the Captain scanned a few papers. The charge was desertion.

"Anything to say?"

"No, sir."

"Why did you desert?"

"I'm fed up with the Navy."

The Captain's eyes grew stern, and he nodded as one who comprehends. There had been moments in his own career when he too had been "fed up with the Navy." But life holds other things than obedience to inclinations.

Now this deserter represented a type that is to be met with in both Services, these days of "piping peace." Recruited from the slums of a great city, bone-lazy and vicious as a weasel, small wonder he found a life wherein men worked hard and cleanly little to his taste. The immaculate cleanliness and clock-work regularity around him were bad enough, but far worse was the discipline. It astonished him at first; then, half-awed, he hated it with all the sullen savagery of his warped nature. The so-called Socialism of black-garbed orators, idly listened to on Sunday afternoons in bygone days, had hinted at such possibilities—but here he met it face to face at every turn.

For a while—a very little while—he defied it, as he had defied impassive policemen in guttersnipe days, with shrill, meaningless obscenities. Then he strove to elude it, and was clouted grievously by O'Leary, the brawny Chief Stoker, in that he had skulked from his lawfully appointed task. He had meant to drop a fire-bar on O'Leary's head for that, but hadn't the courage requisite for murder. Because of his dirty habits and an innate habit for acquiring other men's gear, he was not beloved of his messmates; and to be unpopular on the mess-deck of a man-of-war means that the sooner you seek another walk of life the better. He strove to seek it, accordingly, burrowing back into the teeming slum-life of yore, until one night, in the flare of a hawker's barrow, a policeman's hand closed upon his collar.

"... I think there's time. I believe we'll make a man of you yet. I'll deal with you by warrant."

The escort swung him on his heel.

The Captain glanced again at the charge-sheet and thence to the third culprit before him.

"You were drunk on leave?"

"No, sir."

"But the Officer of the Patrol and the Officer of the Watch and the Surgeon all say you were drunk."

The "bird" sighed deeply. "I 'adn't 'ad no more'n a drop, sir——" he began.

"Deprived of one day's pay," interrupted the Captain; "and get your hair cut."

"'Air cut—forfeit one day's pay," echoed the Master-at-Arms. "*Hon* cap; 'bout turn, quick march!"

* * * * *

The day passed as most days do in harbour. In the afternoon the Captain played a game of golf, and in the evening dined with a brother Captain. During the meal they discussed submarine signalling and a new putter. The Commander, who contemplated matrimony, was in a conservatory conducting himself in a manner calculated to reduce his ship's company—had they been present—to babbling delirium. In the twilight, the Captain's Clerk, with rod and fly-book, meandered beside a stream twenty miles away. The Master-at-Arms, who had a taste for melodrama, witnessed from a plush-lined box "The Body-Snatcher's Revenge" in the company of Mrs and Miss Master-at-Arms and a quart of stout. On board, in the foremost cell, sat a recovered deserter under sentence of ninety days' detention.

"Gawd!" he whined—and in his voice was an exceeding bitterness—"Wotcher want to 'ate me for?"

Now these things were happening at about the same time, so you see the drift of his argument with his Maker.

III.

A GALLEY'S DAY.

Boom! On board the Flagship a puff of smoke rose and dissolved in the breeze; the cluster of whalers and gigs that had been hovering about the starting-line

sped away before the wind. The bay to windward resembled the shallows near the nesting-ground of white-winged gulls as the remaining gigs, whalers, and cutters zigzagged tentatively to and fro, and a couple of belated 25-feet whalers, caught napping, went tearing down among them.

The launches and pinnaces do not start for another hour, and are for the most part still at the booms of their respective ships. There are three more classes before us, and it only remains to keep out of the way and an eye on the stop-watch. The breeze is freshening, and it looks like a "Galley's day." A 32-feet cutter (handiest and sweetest of all Service boats to sail) goes skimming past on a trial run. Her gilded badge gleams in the spray, and there is a sheen of brasswork and enamel about her that proclaims the pampered darling of a ship. The Midshipman at the helm—to show a mere galley what he can do—chooses a squall in which he put her about; she spins round like a top, and is off on her new tack in the twinkling of an eye.

Casey, Petty Officer and Captain's Coxswain, is busy forward with the awning and an additional halliard rove through a block at the foremast head. This, steadied by the boat-hook, will serve us as a spinnaker during the three-mile run down-wind; and, in a Service rig race, is the only additional fitting allowed beyond what is defined as "the rig the boat uses on service, made of service canvas by service labour."

Only half a minute now.... Check away the sheets. Spinnaker halliards in hand.

Boom! We are off! Hoist spinnaker!

As we cross the line the 32-ft. cutter and a couple of gigs slip over abreast of us; astern a host of white sails come bellying in our wake; up to windward the pinnaces and launches are manoeuvring for positions. The cutter has "goose-winged" her dipping-lug and is running dead before the wind. In a narrow boat like a galley this is dangerous and does not pay. Luffing a little, we get the wind on our quarter, and the gigs follow suit. Presently the cutter gybes and loses ground; the gigs, too, have dropped astern a little.

Our galley's crew settle down in the bottom of the boat, and producing pipes and cigarettes from inside their caps, speculate on the chances of the day. Far ahead the smaller fry are negotiating the mark-buoy. Imperceptibly the breeze freshens, till the wind is whipping a wet smoke off the tops of the waves. Casey, tending the main-sheet, removes his pipe and spits overside. "I reckons we'll want our weather-boards before we'm done, sir," he prophesies. We have shown the rest of our class a clean pair of heels by now, and are fast overhauling the whalers. At last the mark-buoy.

"Down spinnaker!" and round we go, close hauled. Now the work starts. A white squall tearing down the bay blinds us with spray and fine desert sand.

The water pours over the gunwale as we luff and luff again. There's nothing for it: we must reef, and while we do so, round come the remainder, some reefed and labouring, others lying up in the wind with flapping sails. A nasty short sea has set in, and at the snub of each wave, the galley, for all the careful nursing she receives, quivers like a sensitive being.

"She can't abear that reef in her foresail," says Casey; "it do make her that sluggish." As he spoke, our rival, the 32-ft. cutter, went thrashing past under full sail, her crew crouched to windward. It was going to be neck or nothing with them. Then, by James—

"Got anything to bail with, forward there?"

"Yessir!" replied seven voices as one.

"Stand-by to shake out that reef!" We luffed for a second while two gigs and a pinnace crept up on our quarter, and then off we went in the seething wake of the cutter. Even Casey's big toe curled convulsively as he braced himself against the thwart and spat on his hands to get a fresh grip on the main-sheet. The spray hissed over us like rain, and, under cover of his oilskin, I believe No. 5, perched on the weather gunwale, was sorrowfully unlacing his boots.

"If it don't get no worse," says Casey, "we'll do all right." With his bull-dog chin above the gunwale he commenced a running commentary on the proceedings. "... 'Strewth! There's 'is foremast gorn!" He gazed astern enraptured. "Commander's weather-shroud carried away, sir, an' 'im a-drifting 'elpless.... Them whalers is bailin' like loo-natics—" he gave a hoarse chuckle, "like proper loo-natics, sir.... That there launch precious near fouled the mark-buoy.... 'E'll run down that gig if 'e don't watch it. Their owner sailing 'er too."

Then the squalls died away and the breeze steadied. I could hear the surge of a launch as she came crashing along on our quarter, but once round the second mark-buoy and on the port tack no one could touch us—at least so Casey vowed.

Suddenly, the half-drowned bowman gave the first sign of animation that he had displayed since the green seas began to break over him. "She's missed stays," he announced with gruff relish, peering under the lip of the foresail.

"'Oo? Not that cutter...?" Casey so far forgot himself as to squirt tobacco juice into the sacred bottom of his own boat. "Yessir, an' so help me," he added in confirmation, "she's in Hirons!"[#]

[#] A boat is said to be "in irons" when she lies dead head-to-wind and cannot pay off on either tack.

The next minute we passed to windward of our rival, as with flapping sheets and reversed helm she drifted slowly astern. Her Midshipman avoided our eyes as we

passed, but his expression of incredulous exasperation I have seen matched only on the face of one whose loved and trusted hunter has refused a familiar jump. Above the noise of the wind and waves I heard his angry wail—

"O-o-oh! Isn't she a cow!"

The wind held fair and true, and, as Casey prophesied, it proved a Galley's day after all. A launch and two pinnaces raced us for the Flagship's ram, and our rudder missed the cable by inches as we wore to bring us on to the finishing line. Even then the launch nearly had it; but I think that the observations exchanged, as we slipped round side by side (*sotto voce* and perfectly audible to every one in both boats), between Casey and the launch's Coxswain, did much to spoil the nerve of the First Lieutenant who was sailing her.

Much of that day I have forgotten. But the sheen of white sails sprinkled along the triangular nine-mile course, the grey hulls of the Fleet against the blue of sea and sky, the tremor of the boat's frame as the water raced hissing past her clinker-built sides, the bucket and shrug, the lurch and reel and plunge as she fought her way to windward,—all these things have combined to make a blur of infinitely pleasant memories.

* * * * *

Casey gave a sigh of contentment and handed back an empty glass through the pantry door.

"Well, sir," he said, "I reckon that was a proper caper!" Then, as if realising that his summing up of the race required adequate embellishment, and less formal surroundings in which to do the occasion justice, he wiped his mouth on the back of a huge paw and moved forward out of sight along the mess-deck.

IV.
"NOEL!"

"'Arf-pas' seven, sir!" A private of Marines rapped heavy knuckles against the chest of drawers, and, seeing the occupant of the bunk stir slightly, withdrew from the cabin. For a little while longer the figure under the blankets lay motionless; then a tousled head appeared, followed by shoulders and arms.

"Gr-r-r!" said their owner. He blinked at the electric light a moment, then

reached out a lean, tatooed arm for his tea. He drank it thoughtfully, and, lighting a cigarette, lay back again. His gaze travelled from the rack overhead that contained his gun and golf-clubs, down over the chest of drawers with its freight of battered silver cups, photographs, and Japanese curios, to the deck where a can of hot water steamed beside the shallow bath; finally it lit on the chair, on the back of which hung his frock-coat. Why had his servant put out his frock-coat? Was it Sunday? For a while he considered the problem.

Then he remembered.

With a grunt he hoisted himself on to one elbow and looked out of the scuttle into the gloom. It was snowing, and the reflected lights of the ships blinked at him across the water.

"Oh Lord!" he ejaculated, and buried himself anew among the blankets. Twenty minutes later, as he was sitting in his bath, the curtain across the door was unceremoniously jerked aside and a ruddy face appeared in the opening.

"No-o-el-l-l! N-o-el!" chanted the apparition. A sponge full of water cut the caroller short, and the sounds of strife and expostulation drifting from adjacent cabins marked the trail of Yuletide greetings.

In the Wardroom the fire was smoking fitfully, each outpour being regarded with philosophic resignation by the Marine duty-servant. Him the First Lieutenant, entering at that moment, drove wrathfully on deck. "Go up an' trim the cowl to the wind: don't stand there trying to mesmerise the infernal thing."

One by one the members of the Mess struggled in and seated themselves in gloomy silence. There were many gaps in the long row of chairs, for every one "spared by the exigencies of the Service" was on leave, the heads of departments being represented by their juniors, and a couple of Watch-keeping Lieutenants completing the complement.

The Young Doctor alone preserved a cheerful mien. "Boy, you're as yellow as a guinea!" was his greeting to the Junior Watch-keeper (recently a sojourner on the West Coast, with a constitution to match). "How's the fever?"

The Junior Watch-keeper ascribed to the malady a quality hitherto unrecognised by the most advanced medical science, and scanned the *menu* indifferently.

The belated arrival of the postman as the table was being cleared did much to brighten matters. A rustling silence, interspersed by an occasional chuckle (hurriedly repressed), presently gave way to general conversation. Pipes were lit, and the fire coaxed into a more urbane frame of mind. The Junior Watch-keeper was seen to transfer stealthily from a letter to his pocket something that crackled crisply. The Young Doctor and the Assistant Paymaster (hereinafter known as the A.P.) sat complacently on his chest while they explored his pockets.

"Let me—it's years since I touched a fiver.... *And* a dun from Ikey—well, I'm

blessed! *And* a Christmas card from Aunt Selina to dear Gussie—oh, Gussie, look at the pretty angels! He hides it in his pocket——"

"He stands fizz all round at seven bells," announced the First Lieutenant in a calm, judicial voice.

The Junior Watch-keeper didn't stand it, but fizz all round there was. The First Lieutenant read prayers on the snow-powdered quarterdeck, and then, following the immemorial custom of the Service, the Wardroom made a tour of the garland-hung mess-deck, halting at each mess to exchange the compliments of the season and to sample the plum-duff.

Properly observed, this ritual would put the normal stomach out of action for the remainder of the day. But there are discreet methods of sampling. The Day-on flopped exhaustedly on to a Wardroom settee, and proceeded to empty his cap of lumps of "figgy-duff," cigarettes, and walnuts. "Bless their hearts," he murmured, "I love them and I love their figgy-duff, but there are limits—here, Jess!" He whistled gently, and a fox-terrier asleep by the fire rose and delicately accepted the tribute. "Number One," continued the speaker, "you looked quite coy when they cheered you, going rounds just now." Then raising his voice he sang—

"For he's a jolly good fe-ello-o-O!"

The First Lieutenant's grave face relaxed. "Less of it, young fellow," he replied, smiling. He had lost a wife and child as a young lieutenant, and something of his life's tragedy still lingered in the level grey eyes.

Then followed the popping of corks and the tinkle of glass. Even the fever-stricken one brightened. "Now then," he shouted truculently to the Young Doctor, "I don't mind if you do wish me a happy Christmas, you benighted body-snatcher." But the Surgeon was opening the piano, and as he fingered the opening bars of "Good King Wenceslas," some one turned and smote the fire into a blaze.

* * * * *

The short day was fading into dusk, and the Mess sat eyeing one another sorrowfully over the tea-table. You can't drink champagne, sing "Good King Wenceslas," and beat the fire all day.

"What price being at home now?" said the Engineer-Lieutenant, gloomily buttering a piece of bread and smearing it with treacle.

"Yes, and charades, and kids, and snapdragon," added the A.P. He mused awhile reminiscently. "Christmas is rotten without kids to buck things up."

The Day-on looked up from a book. ”You’re right. I don’t feel as if it were Christmas day—except for my head,” he added reflectively.

The First Lieutenant entered, holding a note in his hand. ”Look here, the Skipper wants us to have him and his missus to supper. He’ll motor in, and”—he referred again to the note—”he’s bringing the four youngsters—and a Christmas-tree. Wants to know if we can put up a turn for them.”

In the annals of the Service had such a thing ever happened before? The Mess stared wild-eyed at one another. ”Crackers,” gasped the Day-on, visions of childhood fleeting through his mind. ”Santa Claus!” murmured the Young Doctor, already mentally reviewing his store of cotton-wool. ”Holly and mistletoe,” supplemented the Engineer-Lieutenant, eyeing the bare walls of the Mess.

There was much to be done, but they did it somehow. The A.P. sallied forth and stole crackers from a Mission schoolroom. The First Lieutenant and Young Doctor between them fashioned a wondrous wig and beard for Santa Claus. The Junior Watch-keeper is rumoured to have uprooted (under cover of darkness) an entire holly bush from the Admiral Superintendent’s garden, and their guests arrived to find the Mess transformed. No sooner was supper over than the First Lieutenant vanished, and they entered the smoking-room to find a genuine Santa Claus, with snowy beard and gruff voice, dispensing gifts from the magic tree. There were miraculous presents for all: Zeiss binoculars for one (had he not been bemoaning the want of a pair on the bridge a fortnight before?): a wrist-watch for another (it replaced one smashed while working targets not long ago), a fountain-pen for another, a cigarette-holder for a fourth, whose tobacco-stained fingers had long been a subject of reproach from his Captain’s wife.

And when the tree was denuded at last, what an ambush for lurking dragons! They were slain ultimately with a sword-scabbard by a flushed Knight astride the champing Junior Watch-keeper. It figured further in the tiger-shoot conducted from the howdah of an elephant—a noble beast in whose identity no one would have recognised the grey-painted canvas cover of a 3-pdr. gun, much less the Engineer-Lieutenant inside it.

For the matter of that, had you seen the tiger who died, roaring terribly almost within reach of its tethered quarry (Jess, the bored and disgusted terrier), you would never have known the A.P.—especially as he had broken his glasses in the throes of realistic dissolution.

When it was all over, the ”Skipper’s Missus” sat down at the piano, and together they sang the old, memory-haunted Christmas hymns, the woman’s contralto and children’s trebles blending with the voices of men who at heart were ever children themselves.

The First Lieutenant didn't sing. The fire needed so much attending to.

V.
THE ARGONAUTS.

"... Lest perchance them grow weary
In the uttermost parts of the Sea,
Pray for leave, for the good of the Service,
As much and as oft as may be."
—*The Laws of the Navy.*

Life on board a man-of-war in the tropics, especially Gunroom life, is attended by discomforts peculiarly its own. To begin with, a trip at sea heats the ship like a steel-walled Inferno, and on reaching harbour she swings at her anchor, bows-on to what breeze there may be; the chances of getting a cool draught through scuttles and gun-ports are thus reduced to a minimum. There is, furthermore, an Affliction known as "prickly heat," beside which chastisement with scorpions is futile and ineffectual; moreover, you must meet the same faces day after day, month after month, at breakfast, lunch, and dinner, till Junior Officers of His Majesty's Navy have been known to revile one another over each other's style of masticating food. From these conditions of life spring, indeed, a candid and illuminating intimacy; but they are also at times responsible for a weariness of the soul that passes utterly all boredom.

* * * * *

The trouble began in the bathroom, an apartment 12 feet long by 8 feet broad, and occupied at the time by six people in various stages of their ablutions. It concerned the ownership of a piece of soap, which may seem a trivial enough matter—as indeed it was; but when you have lain sweating under the awnings all through a breathless night, when, having watched another aching dawn creep over the sea, you descend to splash sulkily in three inches of lukewarm water, the tired brain lacks a fine sense of the proportion of things.

It finished as suddenly as it flared up, and both combatants realised the

childishness of it all ere the blood had time to dry on their damaged knuckles. But beyond a peevish request that they should not hold their dripping noses over the basins, no one present appeared interested or dismayed—which was a very bad sign indeed.

* * * * *

The Senior Midshipman burst into the Gunroom with a whoop of joy and flung the leave-book on the table.

"What did he say?" chorussed the inmates anxiously.

"Said we could take the third cutter, an' go to Blazes in her," replied the delegate breathlessly, grovelling under the table for his gun-case. "We can clear out till Sunday night, an' if there's a scratch on the new paint when we come back"—the flushed face appeared for an instant—"we'll all be crucified!"

Whereupon ensued swift and awful pandemonium. Three blissful days of untrammelled freedom ashore, in which to eat, bathe, and sleep at will! The Mess rose with one accord and blessed the name of the Commander in ornate phraseology of the Sea. Four navigating experts flung themselves upon a large-scale Admiralty Chart: guns and cartridges appeared as if by magic. A self-appointed Committee of Supply, wrangling amicably, invaded the pantry; blankets were hurriedly dragged from the hammock-nettings, while willing hands lowered the cutter from her davits. In crises such as these there is no need to detail workers for any particular duty. Each one realises his own particular metier and is a law unto himself.

"Hoist foresail!" The boat sheered off lazily from the gangway, and the bowmen tugged and strained at the halliards. "Set mainsail!" A light breeze whispered in from the open sea, and the rippled water clucked and gurgled along the clinker-built sides. Perched on a bundle of rugs in the stern sat the Coxswain, one hand on the tiller, the other shading his eyes from the afternoon sun. The remainder of the crew disposed themselves in more or less inelegant attitudes of ease in the bottom of the boat. She had been rigged and provisioned in silence—not lightly does one imperil one's emancipation by making a noise alongside; but once clear of the ship, the youth tending the main-sheet lifted up his voice in song, a babble of spontaneous nonsense set to a half-remembered tune—

"Isn't this a bit of all-right!
Oh, *isn't* this a bit of all-right!"

he chanted joyously, eyes half closed under the brim of his tilted helmet. Forgotten the weary monotony of ship routine, with its watch-keeping and school,

squabbling and recrimination, and the ceaseless adjustment of the scales of discipline. Forward in the bows one of the bowmen hove the lead, chanting imaginary soundings with ultra-professional intonation: ”A-a-and a ha’ five...” Clinging to the weather shroud, another, a slim, white-clad figure against the blue of sea and sky, declaimed ”The Ancient Mariner”—or as much of it as he could remember.

The islands, that half an hour earlier had been but vague outlines quivering in the heat-haze, took form and substance. Rock-guarded inlets crept up to beaches of white sand where the kelp and drift-wood of ages formed a barrier at high-water mark, and overhanging palms threw shadows deep and delectably mysterious. As the water shoaled, seaweed stretched purple tentacles upward out of the gloom, swaying and undulating towards the swirl beneath the rudder. A half-clad figure in the bows, trailing naked toes over the side, shattered the sleepy silence with shouts that sent the echoes rioting among the rocks. Overhead a startled gull wheeled inquisitively.

”Hard a-port! Now, steady as you go!” With lowered sails and oars rising and dipping lazily, the boat headed towards an inlet whose shelving beach promised good camping-ground. Presently came the order—

”Way enough!” The oars clattered down on to the thwarts, the anchor splashed overside, and a moment later a dozen figures were swimming lustily for thrice-blessed terra firma.

A tent was pitched and the precious guns ferried ashore. An intrepid party of explorers headed off into the jungle in search of pigeon. Others played desultory Rugby football in the shallows, chased lizards, rent the air with song. The long day passed all too quickly. Swiftly the tropic night swept in over painted sky and tree-top. Ghost-like figures came splashing from pools, sliding down from trees, floating shoreward on improvised rafts, to gather round the fire and fizzling frying-pans. Tinned sausages (”Bangers”) and bacon, jam, sardines and bananas, cocoa, beer, and sloe-gin: the Argonauts guzzled shamelessly.

When it was over and pipes and cigarettes were lit, some one rose and flung an armful of dry kelp into the white heart of the fire. It spluttered angrily and then flared, throwing an arc of crimson light on the beach, deepening the obscurity that ringed the seated group.

The Argonaut nearest the fire picked up a pebble and pitched it lazily at a neighbour. ”What about a song, you slacker! Something with a chorus.” The other removed his pipe from his mouth, wriggled into a sitting posture and, hugging the corners of his blanket over his shoulders, started a song. It was from a comic opera two years old, but it was the last thing they heard before leaving England, and the refrain went ringing across the star-lit bay. The firelight waned, and a yellow moon crept up out of the sea, setting a shimmering pathway to the edge of the world.

”Hai-yah!” yawned one. ”So sleepy.” He hollowed out the sand beneath his hip-bone, drew his blanket closer round him, and was asleep. One by one the singers were silent, and as the moon, full sail upon the face of heaven, flooded the islands with solemn light, the last Argonaut rolled over and began to snore. The waves lapped drowsily along the beach; tiny crabs crept out in scurrying, sidelong rushes to investigate the disturbers of their peace; the dying embers of the fire clinked and whispered in the silence.

* * * * *

The Commander, smoking on the after sponson, smiled as the sound of oars came faintly across the water. Out of the darkness drifted the hum of voices, and presently he heard a clear laugh, mirthful and carefree. Knocking the ashes out of his pipe, he nodded sagely, as though in answer to an unspoken question.

VI.

A GUNROOM SMOKING CIRCLE.

Be it understood that Gunroom Officers do not usually talk at breakfast. The right-minded entrench themselves behind newspapers, and deal in all seriousness and silence with such fare as it has pleased the Messman to provide. In harbour, those favoured of the gods make a great business of opening and reading letters, pausing between mouthfuls to smirk in an irritating and unseemly manner. But it is not until one reaches the marmalade stage, and the goal of repletion is nigh, that speech is pardonable, and is then usually confined to observations on the incompetency of the cook in the matter of scrambling eggs and the like.

Abreast the screen-door, which opened from the battery to the quarter-deck, the ship’s side curved suddenly into a semicircular bastion. It was thus designed to give the main-deck gun a larger arc of fire, but had other advantages—affording a glimpse ahead of splayed-out seas racing aft from the bow, and in fine weather a sunny space sheltered from the wind by casemate and superstructure.

Here, one morning after breakfast, came the Gunroom Smokers, pipe and tobacco-pouches in hand. Cigarettes were all very well in their way: ”two draws and a spit” snatched during stand-easy in the forenoon. A cigar was a satisfying enough smoke after dinner when one’s finances permitted it; but while the day of

infinite possibilities still lay ahead, and the raw, new sunlight flushed the world with promise, then was the time for briar or clay: black, well seasoned, and of a pungent sweetness.

Each smoker settled into his favourite nook, and, cap tilted over his nose, with feet drawn up and hand-clasped knees, prepared to sit in kindly judgment on the Universe. The Sub-Lieutenant blew a mighty cloud of smoke and gave a sigh of contentment. He had kept the Middle Watch. From midnight till four that morning he had been on the bridge, moving between the faint glow of the binnacle and the chart-house, busying himself with a ruler and dividers, and faint lines on the surface of the chart. He was clear-eyed and serene of brow, as befitted a man who had seen the dawning. For a like reason he had neglected to shave.

"What's the news?" inquired the Assistant Paymaster between puffs. The ship had been three days at sea, and was even then a hundred and fifty miles from her destination. But very early in the morning a tired-eyed Operator in the Wireless-house had sat, measuring in dots and dashes the beating of the world's pulse.

"A disastrous earthquake—" began a Midshipman, reading from the closely-written sheet.

"Oh, hang you and your earthquake!" said the Sub. "I'm sick of earthquakes—who won the Test Match?" Which, when you consider the matter, is no bad attitude towards life in which to start the day.

"A new aeroplane—" resumed the reader.

"Talkin' of aeroplanes," interrupted some one, "I once knew a girl——"

"Why don't they have Snotties in the Flying Corps?" chimed in a third. "Why, if I were in the Government, I'd——"

But the reader continued in tranquil indifference. Quite a number of years had passed since he first learned that in Gunroom communities to stop speaking on account of interruptions meant spending your days in the silence of a Trappist.

"... at the point of the bayonet, the enemy retreating in disorder." Silence on the group at last. This was of more account than cricket or aeroplanes, for this was War, their trade in theory, and, perchance—and the Fates were wondrous kind—the ultimate destiny of each. The Censor of Governments gave a delighted blast from his pipe—

"The bayonet!" he breathed. "That's the game...!" In all his short life he had never seen a blow delivered in hate—the hate that strikes to kill. Yet a queer light smouldered in his eyes as half-dreamily he watched the waves scurrying to join the smother of the wake.

The Clerk by the muzzle of the 6-in. gun took his pipe out of his mouth and turned towards the speaker. "I've got a brother on the Frontier—lucky blighter, I bet he's in it!" He removed his glasses, as he always did in moments of excitement,

and blinked short-sightedly in the morning sunlight. He came of a fighting strain, but had been doomed by bad sight to exchange the sword, that was his heritage, for pen and ledger. ”Does it say anything else—let me see, Billy.”

”No—no details; only a few casualties; they killed a Subalt—” he stopped abruptly; the wind caught the sheet and whisked it from his fingers. His face had grown white beneath its tan.

”Oh, you ass!” chorussed the group. The piece of paper whirled high in the air and settled into the water astern. A shadow fell athwart the seated group, and the Sub. looked up.

”Hullo! Good-morning, Padre!”

”Good-morning,” replied the sturdy figure in the mortar-board. A genial priest this, who combined parochial duties with those of Naval Instructor, and spent the dog-watches in flannels on the forecastle, shepherding a section of his flock with the aid of boxing-gloves. ”Discussing the affairs of your betters, and the Universe, as usual, I suppose! I came over to observe that there is a very fine horizon, and if any of ye feel an uncontrollable desire to take a sight——”

”Not yet, sir!” protested a clear tenor chorus. ”Morning-watch, sir,” added a voice; then, mimicking the grumbling whine of a discontented Ordinary Seaman: ”Ain’t ’ad no stand-easy—besides, sir, the index-error of my sextant——”

Somewhere forward in the battery the notes of a bugle sang out. The members of the Gunroom smoking circle mechanically knocked out their pipes against the rim of the white-washed spitkid, and rose one by one to their feet, straightening their caps. In a minute the sponson was deserted, save for the Clerk who lingered, blinking at the sunlit sea. A moment later he turned, encountering the kindly, level eyes of the Chaplain.

”The name,” he said, with a little inclination of his head to where, far astern, a gull was circling curiously, ”was it—the same, sir, as—as mine?”

”Yes,” replied the Chaplain gravely.

The boy nodded and turned again to the sea. His young face had hardened, and the colour had gone out of his lips. The other, thrice blessed in the knowledge of how much sympathy unmans, and how much strengthens to endure, laid a steadying hand on the square shoulder presented to him. ”He died fighting, remember,” said this man of peace.

The Clerk nodded again, and gripped the hand-rail harder. ”He always was the lucky one, sir.” He adjusted his glasses thoughtfully, and went below to where,

in the electric-lit office, the ship's Ledger was awaiting him.

VII.
THE SHIP-VISITORS.

"There's the boat!" exclaimed the younger girl excitedly. Her sister nodded with dancing eyes, and half turned to squeeze her mother's arm. Half a mile away a picket-boat detached itself from one of the anchored battleships and came speeding across the harbour. Breathless, they watched it approach, saw bow and stern-sheet men stoop for their boat-hooks, heard the warning clang of the engine-room bell, and the next moment the Midshipman in charge swung her deftly alongside the landing-stage with a smother of foam under the stern. A figure in uniform frock-coat jumped out.

"Hullo, mother! Sorry I'm late: have you been waiting long? ... Mind the step!"

The descent into a picket-boat's stern-sheets, especially if you are encumbered by a skirt, is no easy matter. Perhaps the Midshipman of the boat realised it too, for he abandoned the wheel and assisted in the embarkation with the ready hand and averted eye that told of no small experience in such matters.

Then they heard a clear-cut order, the bell rang again, and the return journey commenced; but they did not hear the hoarse whisper conveyed down the voice-pipe to the Leading Stoker to "Whack her up!" And so they failed to realise that they were throbbing through the water at a speed which, though causing the Midshipmen of passing boats to gnash their teeth with envy, was exceedingly bad for the engines and wholly illegal. But then one does not bring a messmate's sisters off to the ship every day of the week.

Presently the bell rang again, and a grey steel wall, dotted with scuttles and surmounted by a rail, towered above them. The boat stopped palpitating beside a snowy ladder that reached to the water's edge. The occupant of the stockhold threw up the hatch of his miniature Inferno and thrust a perspiring head into view; but it is to be feared that no one noticed him, though he had contributed in no small degree to the passengers' entertainment. The Mother looked at the mahogany-railed ladder and sighed thankfully. "I always thought you climbed up by rope-ladders, dear," she whispered.

The ascent accomplished, followed introductions to smiling and somewhat

bashful youths, who relieved the visitors of parasols and handbags, and led the way to a deck below, where racks of rifles were ranged along white-enamelled bulkheads, and a Marine sentry clicked to attention as they passed. Down a narrow passage, lit by electric lights, past a cage-like kitchen and rows of black-topped chests, and, as the guide paused before a curtained door, a glimpse forward of crowded mess-decks. Then, a little bewildered, they found themselves in a narrow apartment, lit by four brass-bound scuttles. A long table ran the length of the room, with tea things laid at one end; overhead were racks of golf-clubs and hockey-sticks, cricket-bats and racquets. A row of dirks hung above the tiled stove, and a baize-covered notice-board, letter-racks, and a miscellaneous collection of pictures adorned the rivet-studded walls. A somewhat battered piano, topped by a dejected palm, occupied one end of the Mess, and beneath the sideboard a strip of baize made an ineffectual attempt to cover the end of a beer barrel.

"This," said the host, with a tinge of pride in his voice, "is the Gunroom—where we live," he added.

"It's very nice," murmured the visitors.

"It's not a bad one, as Gunrooms go," admitted another of the escort. He did not add that under his personal supervision a harassed throng of junior Midshipmen had pent a lurid half-hour "squaring off" before their arrival.

After tea came a tour of the ship, and to those who inspect one for the first time the interior of a man-of-war is not without interest. They emerged from a hatchway on to the Quarter-deck, beneath the wicked muzzles of the after 12-inch guns: they crossed the immaculate planking and looked down to the level waters of the harbour, thirty feet below. They admired the neatly-coiled boat's falls, the trim and slightly self-conscious figure of the Officer of the Watch, and as they turned to mount the ladder that led over the turret a Signalman came on to the Quarter-deck, raising his hand to the salute as he passed through the screen-door.

"Who did that sailor salute?" inquired the Mother.

"Oh," replied her escort vaguely, "only salutin' the Quarter-deck. We all do, you know." So much for his summary of a custom that has survived from days when a crucifix overshadowing the poop required the doffing of a sailor's cap.

Then they were taken forward, past the orderly confusion of the "booms," to a round pill-box, described as the Conning Tower. with twelve-inch walls of Krupp steel, and introduced to an assortment of levers and voice-pipes, mysterious dials, and a brass-studded steering-wheel. Then up a ladder to the signal-bridge, where barefooted men, with skins tanned brick-red and telescopes under their arms, swung ceaselessly to and fro. They examined the flag-lockers—each flag rolled neatly in a bundle and stowed in a docketed compartment—the black-

and-white semaphores, and the key of the mast-head flashing lamp that at night winked messages across five miles of darkness.

From then onwards that afternoon became a series of blurred impression of things mysterious and delightfully bewildering. They carried away with them memories of the swarming forecastle and batteries, where they saw the sailor-man enjoying his leisure in his own peculiar fashion. Of the six-inch breech-block that opened with a clang to show the spiral grooved bore—rifled to prevent the projectile from turning somersaults.... The younger girl wiped a foot of wet paint off the coaming of a hatch and said sweetly it didn't matter in the least. They invaded the sanctity of the wireless room, with its crackling spark and network of wires, and listened, all uncomprehending, to the petty officer in charge, as, delighted with a lay audience, he plunged into a whirl of technical explanations. And, lastly, the Mother was handed the receivers, and heard a faint intermittent buzzing that was a ship calling querulously three hundred miles away.

After that they descended to electric-lit depths, and were invited into cabins; they visited the "Slop-room" (impossible name), where they fingered serge and duck with feminine appreciation. They saw the nettings where the hammocks were stowed, and the overhead slinging space—eighteen inches to a man! And so back to the upper deck, to find the picket-boat again at the bottom of the ladder.

* * * * *

"Hasn't it been lovely!" gasped the elder girl, as they walked back to their hotel.

"Scrumptious!" assented her sister. "And *did* you notice the boy who steered the boat that brought us back?—he had a face like a cherub looked at through a magnifying-glass!"

Meanwhile, he of the magnified cherubic countenance was rattling dice with a friend preparatory to indulging in a well-earned glass of Marsala. Outside the gunroom pantry the grimy gentleman whose sphere of duty lay in the picket-boat's stockhold sought recognition of his services in an upturned quart jug.

Which is also illegal, and contrary to the King's Regulations and Admiralty Instructions.

VIII.

THE LEGION ON THE WALL.

"Not now. Not now. Not yet." —*Sea Law and Sea Power.*

The last of the Battle Squadrons filed majestically to its appointed anchorage. A snake-like flotilla of Destroyers slid in under the lee of the land and joined the parent ship; wisps of smoke east and west heralded the arrival of far-flung scouts. The great annual War-game was at an end, and the Fleet had met, with rime-crusted funnels and rust-streaked sides, to talk it over and snatch a breathing space ere returning to their wide sea-beats and patrols. Evening drew on, and the semaphores were busy waving invitations to dinner from ship to ship. Opportunities of meeting friends are none too frequent, and when they occur, are often of the briefest. So no time was lost, and a sort of "General Post" ensued among Wardrooms and Gunrooms.

In the Flagship's Wardroom dinner was over, and a haze of tobacco smoke spread among the shaded lights and glinting plate. Conversation that began with technical discussion had become personal and reminiscent. "Do you remember that time..." commenced one. His immediate listeners nodded delightedly, and sat with narrowed eyes and retrospective smiles as the narrator continued, twirling the stem of his wine-glass. Well did they recall the story, but it had to be told again for the joy of the telling, while they supplemented with a forgotten name or incident, harking back to the golden yesterday, when the world went very well indeed. The talk swung north to the Bering Sea and south to Table Bay, forging swift links with the past as it went. It would have seemed to a stranger as if the members of a club had met to discuss a common experience. And yet these men were here haphazard from a dozen ships—their club the Seven Seas, and their common experience, life, as it is to be met in the seaports of the world. As chairs were pushed from the table and the evening wore on, fresh greetings sounded on all sides: "Hullo! Old Tubby, as I live! Good Lord! How long is it since—seven—nine—my dear soul! It's ten weary years..." and so on. They were all young men, too: almost boys, some of them, with eager, excited faces, lean with hard work—worthy sons of the same grey, hard Mother.

Through the skylight came the opening bars of the "Lancers," and there was a general move on deck. The Gunroom was there already, and, two sets being formed, the dance began. Much it left in point of elegance, it is to be feared, but it was fine strenuous exercise. The last figure was reached, and on completion of the Grand-Chain, the two sets linked arms, dashed whooping across the deck, and met in an inextricable heap of arms, legs, crumpled shirt-fronts and mess-jackets.

"Oh, my aunt!" gasped an ex-International, crawling from beneath a mound

of assailants, and vainly striving to adjust collar and tie. ”My last boiled shirt—and it’s got to last another week!”

Presently every one repaired to the Wardroom, where corks were popping from soda-water bottles, and an amateur humourist of renown sat down to the piano as the laughing crowd gathered round. A couple of bridge-tables were made up, and the players settled down with that complacent indifference to outside distraction peculiar to men who live habitually in crowded surroundings. Seated astride the chairs at one end of the mess, two teams of would-be polo-players were soon locked in conflict, table-spoons and an orange being accessories to the game.

The singer of comic songs had finished his repertoire, and the Mess turned in search of fresh distraction. ”Come on, old Mouldy, what about putting up your little turn?” called out one, addressing a grave-faced officer who sat smoking on the settee. ”Yes,” chorussed half a dozen voices, ”go on, do!” The officer addressed as ”Mouldy” sat down at the piano, fingered the keys contemplatively for a moment, and then in a deep baritone voice began—

> ”God of our fathers, known of old,
> Lord of our far-flung battle line,”

and so on to the end of the first verse. The polo-players ceased their horseplay, and leaned panting over the backs of their wooden steeds to listen. The second verse drew to a close—

> ”An humble and a contrite heart,”

and then the group round the singer joined in the refrain—

> ”Lord God of Hosts, be with us yet,
> Lest we forget, lest we forget!”

At the fourth verse the Mess clustered round the piano. The bridge-players had laid their hands down, and at the skylight overhead appeared faces and the glint of uniforms. The Gunroom started the last verse, and the rest joined—men’s voices, bass and tenor, lifting the stately words in a great volume of harmony up through the skylight into the night—

> ”All valiant dust that builds on dust,
> And guarding calls not thee to guard,
> For frantic boast and foolish word

Thy mercy on thy people, Lord!
Amen!"

The last solemn chord died away, and a sudden silence fell upon the Mess: it was some moments before the conversation once more became general. By twos and threes the guests departed. Groups clustered at the gangways; the night was full of farewells and the hooting of picket-boats' syrens. Gradually the Mess emptied, and in the flat where the midshipmen slept silence reigned among the chests and hammocks. The Admiral's guests had also departed, but on the silent quarter-deck two tall figures walked up and down, pipes in mouth.

"I wonder why they sang that thing," said one musingly. His companion paused and stared across the water at the lights of the town. From there his gaze travelled round to the silent Fleet, line after line of twinkling anchor-lights and huge hulls looming through the darkness. "Somehow, it seemed extraordinarily appropriate, with things as they are ashore just now."

"You mean all these strikes and rioting—class-hatred—this futile discussion about armaments—brawling in Parliament.... 'Lesser breeds without the law' gradually assuming control....?"

The other nodded and turned again to the sea; as he moved, a row of miniature decorations on his jacket made a tiny clink. "Yes. And meanwhile we go on just the same, talking as little as they will let us—just working on our appointed task: holding to our tradition of 'Ready, Aye Ready!'"

"Our tradition—yes." His companion gave a little grim laugh. "D'you know the story of the last Legion left on the Wall—?" he jerked his head towards where the Pole Star hung in the starry heavens. "How Rome, sliding into Chaos, withdrew her Legions till only one was left to garrison the Wall. And it was forgotten. Rumours must have reached the fellows in that Legion of what was going on at Home: of blind folly in high places—corruption: defeat. The draggle-tailed Roman Eagle must have been a jest in the market-places of the world."

He paused, puffing thoughtfully. "You can imagine them," he continued, "falling back, tower by tower, on the centre: attacked in front and behind and on both flanks by an enemy they despised as barbarians, but who, by sheer force of numbers, must annihilate them in the end—unless Rome rallied, suppose they could have retreated—or compromised,—haggled for their skins. No one would have thought less of them for it in those days. But they had been brought up in all the brave traditions of their Empire.... When you think of it, there wasn't much left to fight for, except their proud traditions. And yet they fought to the last ... while the Roman Empire went fiddling into ruin."

Far away down the line a mast-head lamp flickered a message out of the darkness. The Fleet was resting like a tired giant; but the pin-point of light, and

another that answered it on the instant a mile away, showed that its sleep was light. ”But the end is not yet,” concluded the speaker.

”No,” replied his companion. He made a little gesture with his pipe-stem, embracing the silent battle-array stretching away into the night. ”Not yet.”

IX.
A TITHE OF ADMIRALTY

It was the hour preceding dinner, and a small boy in the uniform of a Naval Cadet stood on the balcony of an hotel at Dartmouth.

Earlier in the day a tremendous self-importance had possessed his soul; it was begotten primarily of brass buttons and a peaked cap, and its outward manifestation at Paddington Station had influenced a short-sighted old lady in her decision that he was a railway official of vast, if premature, responsibilities. He leaned over the balustrade and looked up harbour; beyond the scattered yachts and coal-hulks, black against the path of the sunset, lay the old *Britannia.* She was moored, this cradle of a generation’s Naval destiny, where the Dart commenced to wind among green hills crowned by woods and red-brown plough lands; and as he stared, the smaller vanities of the morning passed from him.

He was barely fifteen, and his ideas were jumbled and immature, but in a confused sort of way he thought of the thousands of other boys those wooden walls had sheltered, and who, at the bidding of unknown powers, had gone down to the sea in ships.

He pictured them working their pinnaces and cutters—as he would some day—soaked and chilled by winter gales. Others departed for the Mediterranean, where, if the testimony of an aunt (who had once spent a winter at Malta) was to be accepted, life was all picnics and dances. He saw them yet farther afield, chasing slavers, patrolling pirate-infested creeks, fighting through jungle and swamp, lying stark beneath desert stars, ... and ever fresh ones came to fill the vacant places, bred for the work—even as he was to be—on the placid waters of the Dart, amid Devon coombes. It was all a little vainglorious, perhaps; and if his imagination was coloured by the periodicals and literature of boyhood, who is to blame him?

Why it was necessary for these things to be he understood vaguely, if at all. But in some dim way he realised it was part of his new heritage, a sort of

brotherhood of self-immolation and hardship into which he was going to be initiated.

His thoughts went back along the path of the last few years that had followed his father's death. With a tightening of the heart-strings he saw how an Empire demands other sacrifices. How, in order that men might die to martial music, must sometimes come first an even greater heroism of self-denial. Years of thrift and contrivance, new clothes foresworn, a thousand renunciations—this had been his mother's part, that her son might in time bear his share of the Empire's burden.

She came out on to the balcony as the sun dipped behind the hills, and the woods were turning sombre, and slipped a thin arm inside his. It is rarely given to men to live worthy of the mothers that bore them; a few—a very few—are permitted to die worthy of them. Perhaps it was some dim foreknowledge of the end that thrilled him as he drew her closer.

They had dinner, and with it, because it was such a great occasion, a bottle of "Sparkling Cider," drunk out of wine-glasses to the inscrutable Future. Another boy was dining with his parents at a distant table, and at intervals throughout the meal the embryo admirals glanced at one another with furtive interest. After dinner the mother and son sat on the balcony watching the lights of the yachts twinkling across the water, and talked in low voices scarcely raised above the sound of the waves lapping along the quay. At times their heads were very close together, and, since in the star-powdered darkness there were none to see, their hands met and clung.

She accompanied him on board the following day, to be led by a grave-faced Petty Officer along spotless decks that smelt of tar and resin. She saw the chest-deck, where servants were slinging hammocks above the black-and-white painted chests—the chest-deck with its wide casement ports and rows of enamelled basins, and everywhere that smell of hemp and scrubbed woodwork.

"Number 32, you are, sir," said the Petty Officer; and as he spoke she knew the time had come when her boy was no longer hers alone.

They bade farewell by the gangway, under the indifferent eyes of a sentry, and Number 32 watched the frail figure in the waterman's boat till it was out of sight. Then he turned with a desperate longing for privacy—anywhere where he could go and blubber like a kid. But from that time onwards (with the rare exceptions of leave at home) he was never to know privacy again.

II.

The old *Britannia* training consisted of four terms, each of three months' duration, during which a boy fresh from the hands of a tutor or crammer had many things to learn. He was taught to "drop everything and nip!" when called; how, when, and whom to salute. To pull an oar and sail a boat; to knot, splice, and run aloft; how to use a sextant. He learned that trigonometry and algebra were not really meaningless mental gymnastics, but a purposeful science that guided men upon trackless seas. In short, at an age when other schoolboys see their education nearing its end, he had to begin all over again, to be moulded afresh for a higher purpose.

The path of the "New" in those days was by no means strewn with roses. Jerry had to submit to strange indignities and stranger torments at the hands of Olympian "Niners" (Fourth-term Cadets). He had to accustom himself to bathe, dress and undress, to sleep and to pray, surrounded by a hundred others. There was also the business of the hammock, in and out of which he was learning to turn without dishonour.

But the conclusion of the first breathless three months found him amazingly fit and happy. His mind was stored with newly-acquired and vastly interesting knowledge. The beagles and football sweated the "callow suet" off him and gave him the endurance of a lean hound. He was fitting into the new life as a hand into a well-worn glove.

The end of his second term brought the coveted triangular badge on the right cuff that marks the Cadet Captain among his fellows. The duties (which are much the same as those of monitor or prefect) offered him his first introduction to the peculiar essence we call tact, necessary in dealing with contemporaries. About this time began his friendship with Jubbs. This young gentleman's real name was as unlike his sobriquet as anything could be; among a community of Naval Cadets this was perhaps a sufficient *raison d'être*: anyhow none other was ever forthcoming. They earned their "Rugger" colours together as scrum and stand-off halves, and as time went on a slow friendship matured and knit between them. Their first sight of each other had been in the hotel the evening before joining. Thenceforward it pleased the power that is called Destiny to run the brief threads of their lives together to the end.

At the close of their third term they became Chief Cadet Captains, and Jubbs' papa, a long, lean baronet with a beak-like nose, came down to attend the prize-giving. At the conclusion of the ceremony he was piloted to the Canteen, where the Cadet Captains were pleased to "stodge" at his expense, while he—as one who sits at meat among the gods—trumpeted his satisfaction into a flaring bandana handkerchief.

At the end of the fourth and last term Jerry's mother came down to see the last prize-giving, and thus was present when her son received the King's

Medal. For one never-to-be-forgotten moment she watched him turn from the dais and come towards her, erect and rather pale, with compressed lips. But the cheering broke from the throats of three hundred inveterate hero-worshippers like a tempest, and then a mist hid him from her sight.

III.

A P. & O. liner, a few months later, carried Jerry and Jubbs to China. During the voyage they came in contact with a hitherto unrecognised factor in life, and found themselves faced with unforeseen perplexities. One evening, as they leaned over the rail experimenting gingerly with two cigars, Jubbs unburdened himself. "... Besides, they jaw such awful rot," was his final summary of feminine allurements. Jerry nodded, tranquil-eyed. "I know. I told Mrs What's-her-name—that woman with the ear-rings—that I'd got one mother already; and as I'm going to China, and she's going to India, I didn't see the use of being tremendous friends. 'Sides, she's as old as the hills."

Jerry! Jerry! The lady in question was barely thirty, even if she had an unaccountable partiality for taking him into the bows to watch the moon rise over the Indian Ocean.

They joined their ship at Hong-Kong, and found themselves members of a crowded, cockroach-haunted gunroom, where every one was on the best of terms with every one else, and there reigned a communism undreamed of in their philosophy. It is said that in those days of stress and novelty, among unknown faces and unfamiliar surroundings, their friendship bound them in ever-closer ties. The Sub-Lieutenant, when occasion arose for the chastisement of one, thrashed the other out of sheer pity. They kept watch, took in signal exercise, went ashore, shot snipe, picnicked and went through their multifarious duties generally within hail of one another. Till at length Jerry's call of "Jubbs!" and Jubbs' unfailing "Coming!" brought half-wistful smiles to older eyes.

The Boxer rising broke out like a sudden flame, and their letters home, those voluminous and ill-spelt missives that meant so much to the recipients, announced the momentous tidings. Jerry was landing in charge of a maxim gun; Jubbs was to be aide-de-camp to the Commander. Their whites were being dyed a warlike tint of khaki, and they were being sent up to take part in the defence of Tientsin. For a while silence, then at last a letter scrawled in pencil on some provision wrappers. Jerry boasted a three-weeks' growth of stubble, and had killed several peculiarly ferocious Boxer bravos. They were looking forward to

being moved up to Peking for the relief of the Legations, and there was practically no danger as long as a fellow took reasonable precautions. He had not seen Jubbs for some time, but expected to meet him before long.

As a matter of fact, they came together the next afternoon, and their meeting-place was a Joss-house that had been converted into a temporary field-hospital. Jerry was the first to arrive, ”in the bight of a canvas trough”—Jerry, very white and quiet, a purple-brown stain spreading over his dusty tunic and a bullet lodged somewhere near the base of the spine. Towards sunset he became conscious, and the Red Cross nursing sister supported his head while he drank tepid water from a tin mug. ”’Sparkling Cider,’” he whispered weakly, ”for luck, ... thank you, mummie darling.”

The firing outside was becoming intermittent and gradually growing more distant, when the patch of dusty sunlight in the doorway was darkened by a fresh arrival. The stretcher party laid him on the bed next to Jerry and departed. The Surgeon made a brief examination, and as he straightened up, met the pitying eyes of the Red Cross sister. He shook his head.

”The poor children,” she whispered. Outside there came a sudden renewal of firing and the spiteful stammer of a maxim. It died away, and there was silence, broken by the buzzing of flies in the doorway and the sound of some one fighting for his breath. In the heavy air the sickly smell of iodoform mingled with the odours of departed joss-sticks and sun-baked earth.

Suddenly, from a bed in the shadows, a weak voice spoke—

”Jubbs!” said Jerry.

A moment’s pause, while the motionless figure in the next bed gathered energy for a last effort of speech. Then—

”Coming!” said Jubbs.

X.

THE CHOSEN FOUR.

The Admiral, it was rumoured, had said, ”Let there be Signal Midshipmen.” Wherefore the Flag-Lieutenant communed with the Commander, who sent for the Senior Midshipman.

The Senior Midshipman responded to the summons with an alacrity that hinted at a conscience not wholly void of offence.

”Let there be Signal Midshipmen,” said the Commander, or words to that effect, ”in four watches.”

”Aye, aye, sir,” said the Senior Midshipman. He emerged from the Commander’s cabin and breathed deeply, as one who had passed unscathed through a grave crisis. Apparently that small matter of the picket-boat’s damaged stem-piece had been overlooked.

Ere he was out of earshot, however, the Commander spoke again. ”By the way,” added the Arbiter of his little destinies, ”I don’t want to see your name in the leave-book again until the picket-boat is repaired.”

”Aye, aye, sir,” repeated the Senior Midshipman. He descended to the Gun-room, where, it being ”make-and-mend” afternoon, his brethren were wrapped in guileless slumber. An ’Inman’s Nautical Tables,’ lying handy on the table, described a parabola through the air, and, striking a prominent portion of the nearest sleeper’s anatomy, ricochetted into his neighbour’s face. The two sat up, glowered suspiciously at each other for an instant, and joined battle. The shock of their conflict overturned a form, and two more recumbent figures awoke wrathfully to ”life and power and thought.”

”You four,” announced the Senior Midshipman calmly, when the uproar had subsided, ”will take on signal duty from to-morrow morning.” Then, having satisfactorily discharged the duty imposed upon him, he settled himself to slumber on the settee.

Three of the four, to whom this announcement was made gasped and were silent. *Signals*! Under the very eye of the Admiral! Each one saw himself an embryo Flag-Lieutenant.... One even made a little prophetic motion with his left arm, as though irked by the aiguilette that in fancy already encircled it. The fourth alone spoke—-

”Crikey!” he muttered, ”an’ my only decent pair of breeches are in the scran-bag”[#]

[#] The ”scran-bag” is the receptacle for articles of clothing, &c., left lying about at First Lieutenant’s rounds in the morning. Gear thus impounded can be redeemed once a week by payment of a bar of soap.

* * * * *

Men say that with the passing of ”Masts and Yards” the romance of the Naval Service died. This is for those to judge who have seen a fleet of modern battleships flung plunging from one complex formation to another at the dip of a ”wisp of coloured bunting,” and have watched the stutter of a speck of light, as unseen

ships talk across leagues of darkness.

The fascination of a game only partly understood, yet ever hinting vast possibilities, seized upon the minds of the Chosen Four. Morse and semaphore of course they knew, and the crude translations of the flags were also familiar enough. But the inner mysteries of the science (and in these days it is a very science) had not as yet unfolded themselves.

At intervals the Flag-Lieutenant would summon them to his cabin, where, with the aid of the Signal Books and little oblong pieces of brass, he demonstrated the working of a Fleet from the signal point of view, and how a mistake in the position of a flag in the hoist might result in chaos—and worse.

The Chosen Four sat wide-eyed at his feet amid cigarette ash and the shattered fragments of the Third Commandment.

Harbour watch-keeping perfected their semaphore and Morse, till by ceaseless practice they could read general signals flashed at a speed that to the untrained eye is merely a bewildering flicker. As time wore on they began to acquire the almost uncanny powers of observation common to the lynx-eyed men around them on the bridge.

Each ship in a Fleet is addressed by hoisting that ship's numeral pendants. The ship thus addressed hoists an answering pendant in reply. At intervals all through the day the Signal Yeoman of the Watch would suddenly snap his glass to his eye, pause an instant as the wind unfurled a distant flutter of bunting at some ship's yard-arm, and then jump for the halyard that hoisted the answering pendant. The smartness of a ship's signal-bridge is the smartness of that ship, and in consequence this is a game into which the stimulus of competition enters, Signal Boatswain, Midshipmen, and Yeomen vying with each other to be the first to give the shout, "Up Answer!"

One night at the Junior Officers' Club one of the Chosen Four encountered another of his ilk from a different ship: and, since at eighteen (if you are ever to become anything) shop is a right and necessary topic of conversation, they fell to discussing their respective bridges.

Presently said he of the other ship, waxing pot-valiant by reason of Marsala, "I'll bet you a dinner ashore we'll show your pendants before the week's up."

Now should a ship fail to see a signal made to her, other ships present can be very offensive by hoisting the pendants of the ship addressed at mast-head and yard-arms. This is to hold the delinquent up as an object of scorn and derision to the Fleet, and is a fate more dreaded by right-minded signalmen than the Plagues of Egypt.

"An' I'll give you fifteen seconds' grace," added the speaker.

The challenge was accepted, and for five sweltering days—it was summer at Malta—the two ships watched each other from sunrise till dark, the pendants

”bent” to the halyards in readiness. On the evening of the sixth day a thunderstorm that had been brewing all the afternoon burst in a torrential downpour over the harbour. At that instant a signal crept to the flagship’s yard-arm.

On board the ship addressed the Midshipman had dashed for the shelter of the bridge-house, the Yeoman was struggling into an oilskin, and the Second Hand had stepped into the lee of a search-light.

”Stand by—thirteen, fourteen...” counted the small figure standing in the driving rain on the flagship’s bridge, watch in hand: ”fifteen, Hoist!” Then for the first time in his short career he deserted his post. Clattering pell-mell down the ladders to the Gunroom, where the remainder of the Chosen Four were playing cut-throat whist, he flung back the drab-coloured curtain.

”Got him!” he shouted triumphantly. ”By the aching stomach, I had him *cold*!”

* * * * *

I have said that of the Chosen Four—three saw visions, while the other bewailed the inaccessibility till the end of the week of his best trousers. Now of the four he alone came to wear the aiguilettes of a Flag-Lieutenant, and to-day the mysteries of Tactics, Fleet Organisation and Formation, are to him as an open book. A Baker Street photographer once had the temerity to display his photograph in the window, in uniform, tinted. Passing by, I heard a woman gush foolishly to her companion, ”Oh, isn’t he a darling!”

The relevancy of this anon.

Another forsook the bunting-draped path of Signals to climb to fame through the smoke of many battle practices. He now adds after his rank the cryptic initial (G). The third married an heiress and her relations, and retired. He has several children and is reported to have lost interest in the Service.

The remaining one, when I saw him last, had also lost interest in the Service. He was lying in a curiously crumpled heap across the stakes of a jungle stockade, his empty revolver dangling by the lanyard round his neck. A handful of his men fought like demons to recover possession of the mutilated body.

”Sure,” said a bearded Petty Officer, half apologetically, wiping his cutlass with a tussock of grass, ”we couldn’t lave him there—an’ himself somewan’s darlin’, likely...”

Sailors are inveterate sentimentalists.

XI.
A COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY.

The Junior Watch-keeper entered the Wardroom and rang the bell with an air of gloomy mystery.

"The Russians are coming," he announced. "Cocktail, please, waiter."

The Young Doctor looked up from the year-old 'Bradshaw' with which he was wont to enliven moments of depression by arranging mythical week-ends at friends' houses in various parts of England. It was a dreary amusement, and, conducted off the coast of Russian Tartary, stamped him as the possessor of no small imaginative powers.

"Who said so?"

"Skipper: three Russian Destroyers, an' we're to invite them to dinner, an' there's nothing to eat." The Junior Watch-keeper managed the affairs of the Mess for that quarter.

"Those chaps feed like fighting-cocks," observed the Assistant Paymaster. "Let's send for the Messman."

The Junior Watch-keeper applied himself to his cocktail in silence, and the Celestial bandit who, in consideration of a monthly levy of thirty dollars per head, starved or poisoned them according to his whim, appeared in the doorway. The Mess broached the subject with quailing hearts; it was proposed to dine the representatives of a foreign Power. Could he for once rise to the occasion and produce a suitable repast?

The Oriental summed up the situation with impassive brevity—

"No can do."

"Oh, rot!" said the Junior Watch-keeper, who up to this juncture had been gracefully pursuing the olive at the bottom of his glass with the tip of his tongue. "Pull your socks up, Ah Chee, an' think of something."

The Messman brooded darkly. "S'pose you go shore-side, catchee salmon, catchee snipe, pl'aps can do."

"By Jove, yes," said the A.P., rising and walking to the scuttle. "We never thought of that. But it's a God-forsaken place—look at it."

The ship was anchored in a little bay off the mouth of a shallow river.

On one side the ground rose abruptly to a bleak promontory, and on the other stretched a waste of sand-dunes. Inland not a tree or vestige of human habitation broke the dreary expanse of plain, which was covered with stunted bushes and rolled away to a range of low hills in the distance.

"All very fine to talk about salmon," said the Young Doctor, "but there isn't a rod in the ship, and no one could use it if there was."

"Make one," suggested the Junior Watchkeeper, with cheerful resource begotten of cocktails.

"But flies—? A rod's no good without flies and things."

"I'll make a spinner. They won't take a fly in these parts, a fellow told me at Shanghai. 'Sides, we can't chuck a fly."

The Carpenter was summoned to the conclave, and the result of his labours was a formidable spar, resembling more closely a hop-pole than a salmon-rod, some fourteen feet in length.

"Why not take the lower boom and have done with it?" inquired the Young Doctor, who had abandoned 'Bradshaw' in favour of his gun-case, and was dabbling with awful joy in oil and cotton-waste.

The Junior Watch-keeper vouched no reply. His was the spirit of the "Compleat Angler," and armed with a nippers and clasp-knife he wrestled grimly with the lid of a tobacco-tin. Half an hour's toil, conducted in profane silence, resulted in a triangular object which, embellished with red bunting and bristling with hooks, he passed round for the startled consideration of the Mess.

"Well," admitted the Young Doctor, with the air of one generously conceding a debatable point, "you *might* catch the bottom, with a certain amount of luck, but—" a well-flung cushion cut short further criticism, and the Committee of Supplies adjourned.

The rising sun next morning beheld three depressed-looking figures disembarking on the sandy beach. The Junior Watch-keeper had fashioned a wondrous reel out of pieces of a cigar-box, and the Boatswain had provided about thirty fathoms of mackrel-line and some thin wire. The A.P. essayed a joke about using the rod as a flagstaff to commemorate their landing, but it lacked savour—as indeed jests do in the pale light of dawn. Wreaths of mist hung over the river, swirling between sandy banks, leaden-grey and noiseless. A few gulls wheeled overhead, protesting at the invasion with dismal cries, and the waves broke whispering along the beach in an arc of foam.

The three adventurers gazed despondently at the sand-dunes, the receding stern of the boat, and finally each other's sleepy, unshaven faces. The Young Doctor broke suddenly into a feeble cackle of laughter. An unfamiliar chord of memory vibrated, and with it came a vision of a certain coffee-stall outside Charing Cross Station and the Junior Watch-keeper's wan face surmounted by

a battered opera-hat. ”Jove!” he murmured. ”... Reminds me ... Covent Garden Ball...!”

The A.P. had toiled to the top of an adjacent mound, from which, like Moses of old, he ”surveyed the landscape o’er.” ”Come on,” he shouted valiantly.

”Well,” said the Junior Watch-keeper, ”*Vive le sport*! If there were no fools there’d be no fun.” He shouldered his strange impedimenta and joined the A.P.

Away to their left a glint of water showed intermittently as the river wound between clumps of low bushes and hillocks. Patches of level ground covered with reeds and coarse grass fought with the sand-dunes, and stretched away in dreary perspective to the hills. Briefly they arranged their plan of campaign: the Junior Watch-keeper was to fish up-stream, the other two meeting him about five miles inland in a couple of hours’ time. They separated, and the Junior Watchkeeper dipped behind a rise and was lost to view.

It is not recorded what exactly the snipe were doing that day. The Young Doctor had it that they were ”taking a day off,” the A.P. that they had struck the wrong part of the country. But the melancholy fact remains that two hours later they sat down to share their sandwiches with empty bags and clean barrels. A faint shout from out of the distance started them again into activity.

”He’s fallen in,” suggested the Young Doctor with cheerful promptitude.

”Sat on the hook, more likely.” There was grim relish in the A.P.’s tone. Neither was prepared for the spectacle that met their astonished eyes when they reached the river.

Standing on a partly submerged sand-bank, in the middle of the stream, dripping wet and ”full of strange oaths,” was the Junior Watchkeeper. The point of his rod was agitated like the staff of a Morse signaller’s flag, while a smother of foam and occasional glimpses of a silver belly twenty yards up-stream testified that the age of miracles had not yet passed.

”Play him, you fool!” yelled the A.P.

”Can’t,” wailed the Junior Watch-keeper, battling with the rod. ”The reel’s jammed!”

”Look out, then!” shouted the Young Doctor, and the safety-catch of his gun snapped. ”Let me have a shot——”

But the Junior Watch-keeper had abandoned his rod. Seizing the stout line in his fingers, his feet braced in the yielding sand, shamelessly he hauled the lordly fish, fighting, to his feet. ”Come on,” he spluttered, ”bear a hand, you blokes!” The ”blokes” rushed into the shallows, and together they floundered amid a tangle of line and showers of spray, grabbing for its gills. Eventually it was flung ashore, and the *coup de grâce* administered with the butt-end of the A.P.’s gun.

”Thirty pounds, if it’s an ounce,” gasped the Junior Watch-keeper, wringing

the water out of his trousers. They stood and surveyed it in amazed silence, struck dumb with the wonder of the thing. Contrasted with the salmon as they knew it—decorated with sprigs of fennel on a fishmonger's slab—it looked an uncouth creature, with an underhung jaw and a curiously arched back. The A.P. prodded it suspiciously with the toe of his boot.

"'S'pose it's all right—eh? Clean run, an' all the rest of it?"

"Course it is," replied the Junior Watchkeeper indignantly. He knew no more about its condition than the other two, but his was all the pride of capture. He relieved the tedium of the return journey with tales of wondrous salmon that lurked in pools beneath the bank; unmoved they listened to outrageous yarns of still larger salmon that swam in open-mouthed pursuit of the home-made spinner, jostling each other by reason of their numbers. The Junior Watch-keeper had set out that morning an honourable man, who had never angled for anything larger than a stickleback in his life. He returned at noon hugging a thirty-pound salmon, his mouth speaking vanity and lies.

"An' I nearly shot the damn thing," sighed the Young Doctor at the close of the recital.

"What *did* you shoot, by the way?" asked the Junior Watch-keeper loftily.

"Nothing," was the curt reply, and his cup of happiness ran over.

* * * * *

The principal guest of the evening eyed a generous helping of salmon that was placed in front of him, and turned to his neighbour. "Pardon me," he said courteously, "but does this fish happen to have been caught in any of the local rivers?"

All eyes turned to the Junior Watchkeeper, who, prevented by a mouthful from replying, sat breathing heavily through his nose. "Because if it was," went on the Russian, "I think I ought to warn you—at the risk of giving you offence—that local salmon are poisonous. That is, unfit for human consumption."

Followed an awful silence. The Young Doctor broke it. "How interesting," he observed feebly; "but why?"

The Russian shook his head. "I don't really know. And I hope you will forgive me for assuring you that they are dangerous to the health."

"Oh," said the captor faintly, "I've eaten my whack!"

The remainder of the dinner was not, gastronomically speaking, a success. The Mess and their guests eyed one another at intervals with furtive apprehension, much as Cleopatra's poisoned slaves must have awaited the appearance of each other's symptoms. But it was not until some hours later that the Young Doctor was awakened by some one calling his name aloud. He sat up in his bunk and listened, and presently it was borne upon him that somewhere, in the stillness of

the night, watches, the Junior Watch-keeper was dreeing his weird.

XII.
THAT WHICH REMAINED.

Oddly enough, no record exists of the origin of his nickname. ”Periwinkle” he had been all through crammer and *Britannia* days. As senior Signal Midshipman of the Mediterranean Flagship, he was still ”The Periwinkle,” small for his years, skinny as a weasel, with straight black hair, and grey eyes set wide apart in a brown face; the eyelashes, black and short, grew very close together, which gave him the perpetual appearance of having recently coaled ship and neglected to clean the dust from his eyes.

The Signal Midshipmen of a fleet, especially the Mediterranean Fleet of those days, were essentially keen on their ”job.” The nature of the work and inter-ship rivalry provided for that. But with the Periwinkle, Signals were more than a mere ”job.” They formed his creed and recreation: the flag-lockers were tarpaulin-covered shrines; the semaphores spoke oracles by day as did the flashing lamps by night. And the high priest of these mysteries was the Flag-Lieutenant, a Rugby International and right good fellow withal, but, to the Periwinkle, a very god who walked among men.

To understand something of his hero-worship you would need to have been on the bridge when the Fleet put out to sea for tactics. It was sufficient for the Periwinkle to watch this immaculate, imperturbable being snap out a string of signals apparently from memory, as he so often did, while hoist after hoist of flags leaped from the lockers and sped skywards, and the bridge was a whirl of bunting. Even the Admiral, who spoke so little and saw so much, was in danger of becoming a mere puppet in the boy’s sight.

But there was more than this to encourage his ardour. The Flag-Lieutenant, recognising the material of a signalman of unusual promise, would invite the Periwinkle to his cabin after dinner and unfold, with the aid of printed diagrams and little brass oblongs representing ships, the tactical and strategical mysteries of his craft. There was one unforgettable evening, too, when the Periwinkle was bidden to dinner ashore at the Malta Club. The dinner was followed by a dance, whereat, in further token of esteem, the Flag-Lieutenant introduced him to a lady of surpassing loveliness—The Fairest (the Periwinkle was given to understand)

of All the Pippins.

The spring gave place to summer, and the island became a glaring wilderness of sun-baked rock. For obscure reasons of policy the Fleet remained at Malta instead of departing on its usual cruise, and week after week the sun blazed pitilessly down on the awnings of the anchored ships. Week by week the Periwinkle grew more brown and angular, and lost a little more of his wiry activity. The frequent stampedes up and down ladders with signals for the Admiral sent him into a lather like a nervous horse; at the end of a watch his hair was wet with perspiration and his whites hung clammily on his meagre limbs. After a while, too, he began to find the glare tell, and to ease the aching of his eyes, had sometimes to shift the telescope from one eye to the other in the middle of a signal. As a matter of fact, there was no necessity for him to read signals at all: that was part of the signalman's duty. And if he had chosen to be more leisurely in his ascent and descent of ladders, no one would have called him to account. But his zeal was a flame within him, and terror lest he earned a rebuke from the Flag-Lieutenant for lack of smartness, lent wings to his tired heels.

It was August when the Flag-Lieutenant sought out the Fleet Surgeon in the Wardroom after dinner, and broached the subject of the Periwinkle.

"P.M.O., I wish you'd have a look at that shrimp; he's knocking himself up in this heat. He swears he's all right, but he looks fit for nothing but hospital."

So the Periwinkle was summoned to the Fleet Surgeon's cabin. Vehemently he asserted that he had never felt better in his life, and the most the fatherly old Irishman could extort from him was the admission that he had not been sleeping particularly well. As a matter of fact he had not slept for three nights past; but fear lest he should be "put on the list" forbade his admitting either this or the shooting pain behind his eyes, which by now was almost continual. The outcome of the interview, however, was an order to turn in forthwith. Next morning the Periwinkle was ignominiously hoisted over the side in a cot—loudly protesting at the indignity of not even being allowed to walk—en route for Bighi Hospital as a fever patient.

II.

The news of the world is transmitted to Naval Stations abroad by cable, and promulgated by means of Wireless Telegraphy to ships cruising or out of reach of visual signalling. At Malta the news is distributed to ships present in harbour by semaphore from the Castile, an eminence above the town of Valletta, command-

ing the Grand Harbour and nearly opposite the Naval Hospital.

One morning a group of convalescents were sunning themselves on the balcony of the hospital, and one, watching the life of the harbour through a telescope, suddenly exclaimed, ”Stand by! They’re going to make the Reuter Telegram. I wonder how the Navy got on at Lords.”

”It’s hopeless trying to read it,” said another, ”they make it at such a beastly rate.”

The Periwinkle, fuming in bed in an adjacent ward, overheard the speaker. In a second he was on his feet and at the open window, a tousled-haired object in striped pyjamas, crinkling his eyes in the glare. ”I can read it, sir; lend me the glass.”

”You ought to be in bed, my son. Haven’t you got Malta Fever?”

”It’s very slight,” replied the Periwinkle—as indeed it was,—”and I’m quite as warm out here as in bed. May I borrow your glass?”

He took the telescope and steadied it against a pillar. The distant semaphore began waving, and the group of convalescents settled down to listen. But no sound came from the boy. He was standing with the eye-piece held to his right eye, motionless as a statue. A light wind fluttered the gaudy pyjamas, and their owner lowered the glass with a little frown, half-puzzled, half-irritated.

”I—it’s—there’s something wrong—” he began, and abruptly put the glass to his left eye. ”Ah, that’s better....” He commenced reading, but in a minute or two his voice faltered and trailed off into silence. He changed the glass to his right, and back to his left eye. Then, lowering it, turned a white scared face to the seated group. ”I’m afraid I can’t read any more,” he said in a curiously dry voice; ”I—it hurts my eyes.”

He returned the glass to its owner and hopped back into bed, where he sat with the clothes drawn up under his chin, sweating lightly.

After a while he closed his left eye and looked cautiously round the room. The tops of objects appeared indistinctly out of a grey mist. It was like looking at a partly fogged negative. He closed his right eye and repeated the process with the other. His field of vision was clear then, except for a speck of grey fog that hung threateningly in the upper left-hand corner.

By dinner-time he could see nothing with the right eye, and the fog had closed on half the left eye’s vision.

At tea-time he called the Sister on duty—

”My eyes—hurt ... frightfully.” Thus the Periwinkle, striving to hedge with Destiny.

”Do they?” sympathised the Sister. ”I’ll tell the Surgeon when he comes round to-night, and he’ll give you something for them. I shouldn’t read for the present if I were you.”

The Periwinkle smiled grimly, as if she had made a joke, and lay back, every nerve in his body strung to breaking-point.

"Can't see, eh?" The visiting Surgeon who leaned over his bed a few hours later looked at him from under puzzled brows. "Can't see—d'you mean...." He picked up an illustrated paper, holding it about a yard away, and pointed to a word in block type: "What's this word?"

The Periwinkle stared past him with a face like a flint. "I can't see the paper. I can't see you ... or the room, or—or—anything.... I'm blind." His voice trembled.

To the terror by night that followed was added physical pain past anything he had experienced or imagined in his short life. It almost amazed him that anything could hurt so much and not rob him of consciousness. The next room held a sufferer who raved in delirium: cursing, praying, and shrieking alternately. The tortured voice rose in the stillness of the night to a howl, and the Periwinkle set his teeth grimly. He was not alone in torment, but his was still the power to meet it like a man.

By the end of a week the pain had left him. At intervals during this period he was guided to a dark room—for the matter of that, all rooms were dark to him—and unseen beings bandied strange technicalities about his ears. "Optic neuritis ... retrobulbar ... atrophy." The words meant nothing to the boy, and their meaning mattered less. For nothing, they told him, could give him back his sight. After that they left him alone, to wait with what patience he might until the next P. & O. steamer passed through.

His first visitor was the Chaplain, the most well-meaning of men, whose voice quavered with pity as he spoke at some length of resignation and the beauty of cheerfulness in affliction. On his departure, the Periwinkle caught the rustle of the Sister's dress.

"Sister," said the boy, "will you please go away for a few minutes. I'm afraid I have to swear—out loud."

"But you mustn't," she expostulated, slightly taken aback. "It's—it's very wicked."

"Can't help that," replied the Periwinkle austerely. "Please go at once; I'm going to begin."

Scandalised and offended—as well she might be—she left the Periwinkle to his godless self, and he swore aloud—satisfying, unintelligible, senseless lower-deckese. But when she brought him his tea an hour later she found he had the grace to look ashamed of himself, and forgave him. They subsequently became great friends, and at the Periwinkle's dictation she wrote long cheerful letters that began: "My dear Mother," and generally ended in suspicious-looking smudges.

Every one visited the Periwinkle. His brethren from the Fleet arrived, bearing as gifts strange and awful delicacies that usually had to be confiscated, sym-

pathising with the queer, clumsy tenderness of boyhood. The Flag-Lieutenant came often, always cheerful and optimistic, forbearing to voice a word of pity: for this the Periwinkle was inexpressibly grateful. He even brought the Fairest of All the Pippins, but the boy shrank a little from the tell-tale tremor she could never quite keep out of her voice. Her parting gift was an armful of roses, and on leaving she bent over till he could smell the faint scent of her hair. "Good-bye," she whispered; "go on being brave," and, to his wrathful astonishment, kissed him lightly on the mouth.

There was the Admiral's wife too—childless herself—who, from long dealings with men, had acquired a brusque, almost masculine manner. As soon as he had satisfied himself that she evinced no outward desire to "slobber," the Periwinkle admitted her to his friendship. He subsequently confessed to the Sister that, for a woman, she read aloud extremely well. "Well, I must be goin'," she said one day at parting. "I'll bring John up to see you to-morrow." When she had gone, the Periwinkle smote his pillow. "John!" he gasped.

"John" was the Admiral.

Even the crew of his cutter—just the ordinary rapscallion duty-crew of the boat he had commanded—trudged up one sweltering Sunday afternoon, and were ushered with creaking boots and moist, shiny faces into his ward.

"Bein' as we 'ad an arfternoon orf, sir," began the spokesman, who was also the Coxswain of the boat. But at the sight of the wavering, sightless eyes, although prompted by nudges and husky whispers, he forgot his carefully-prepared sentences.

"We reckoned we'd come an' give you a chuck-up, like, sir," concluded another, and instead of the elaborate speech they had deemed the occasion demanded, they told him of their victory in a three-mile race over a rival cutter. How afterwards they had generously fraternised with the vanquished crew,—so generously that the port stroke—"'im as we calls 'Nobby' Clark, sir, if you remembers"—was at that moment languishing in a cell, as a result of the lavish hospitality that had prevailed. Finally, the Periwinkle extended a thin hand to the darkness, to be gripped in turn by fourteen leathery fists, ere their owners tiptoed out of the room and out of his life.

III.

The Periwinkle found blindness an easier matter to bear in the ward of a hospital than on board the P. & O. Liner by which he was invalided home. A Naval

Sick-berth Steward attended to his wants, helped him to dress, and looked after him generally. But every familiar smell and sound of ship-life awoke poignant memories of the ship-life of former days, and filled him with bitter woe. He was morbidly sensitive of his blindness, too, and for days moped in his cabin alone, fiercely repelling any attempt at sympathy or companionship. Then, by degrees, the ship's doctor coaxed him up into a deck-chair, and sat beside him, warding off intruders and telling stories with the inimitable drollery that is the heritage of the surgeons of P. & O. Liners. And at night, when the decks were clear, and every throb of the propellers was a reminder of the home they were drawing near to, he would link his arm loosely within the boy's and together they would walk to and fro. During these promenades he invariably treated the Periwinkle as a man of advanced years and experience, whereby was no little balm in Gilead.

Many people tried to make a fuss of the boy with the sullen mouth, whose cheek-bones looked as if they were coming through the skin, and who had such a sad story. Wealthy globe-trotters, Anglo-Indians, missionaries, and ladies of singular charm and beauty, all strove according to their lights to comfort him. But by degrees they realised he never wanted to play cat's-cradle or even discuss his mother, and so left him in peace.

But the boy had a friend beside the doctor, a grizzled major from an Indian Frontier regiment, returning home on furlough with a V.C. tacked on to his unpretentious name. At first the Periwinkle rather shrank from a fresh acquaintance—it is a terrible thing to have to shake hands with an unknown voice. But he was an incorrigible little hero-worshipper, and this man with the deep steady voice had done and seen wonderful things. Further, he didn't mind talking about them—to the Periwinkle; so that the boy, as he sat clasping his ankles and staring out to sea with sightless eyes, was told stories which, a week later, the newspaper reporters of the Kingdom desired to hear in vain.

He was a philosopher too, this bronzed, grey-haired, warrior with the sun-puckered eyes: teaching how, if you only take the trouble to look for it, a golden thread of humour runs through all the sombre warp and woof of life; and of "Hope which ... outwears the accidents of life and reaches with tremulous hand beyond the grave and death."

This is the nicest sort of philosophy.

But for all that it was a weary voyage, and the Periwinkle was a brown-faced ghost, all knees and elbows and angularities by the time Tilbury was reached. The first to board the ship was a lady, pale and sweetly dignified, whom the doctor met at the gangway and piloted to the Periwinkle's cabin. He opened the door before he turned and fled, and so heard, in her greeting of the Periwinkle, the infinite love and compassion that can thrill a woman's voice.

* * * * *

In a corner of the railway carriage that carried them home, the Periwinkle—that maimed and battered knight—still clung to the haft of his broken sword. ”I meant to do so jolly well. Oh, mother, I meant you to be so jolly proud of me. The Flag-Lieutenant said I might have been ... if only it had been an arm or a leg—deaf or dumb ... but there’s nothing left in all the world ... it’s empty—nothing remains.”

She waited till the storms of self-pity and rebellion passed, leaving him biting his fingers and breathing hard. Then little by little, with mysterious tenderness, she drew out the iron that had entered the boyish soul. And, at the last, he turned to her with a little fluttering sigh, as a very tired child abandons a puzzle. She bent her head low—

”This remains,” she whispered.

XIII.

THE TIZZY-SNATCHER.

In the beginning he was an Assistant Clerk—which is a very small potato indeed; his attainments in this lowly rank were limited to an extensive and intimate knowledge of the various flavours of gum employed in the composition of envelopes. Passing straight from a private school, he began life in the Gunroom of a sea-going ship, and was afraid with a great amazement.

The new conditions amid which in future he was to have his being unfolded themselves in a succession of crude disillusionments. He found himself surrounded by Midshipmen: contemporaries, but, as they took care to remind him, men in authority—beings with vast, dimly conceived responsibilities: barbarous in their manners, incomprehensive of speech. To the pain of countless indignities was added the fear of personal chastisement (had he not read of such things?), and, having been delicately nurtured, it is to be feared that the days of his earlier service were not without unhappiness.

With the experience of a commission abroad, however, things began to assume their proper perspective. He became a Clerk, R.N., and blossomed into the dignity of a frock-coat and sword at Sunday morning Divisions, whereby was no small balm in Gilead.

Your Midshipman differs but little in point of thoughtless cruelty from his

brethren of "Quad" and school bench. But the mess-mates who (obedient to the boyish dictates of inhumanity, and for the good of his immortal soul) had chaffed and snubbed him into maturity, now appreciated him for the even temper and dry sense of humour he acquired in the process.

Having mastered the queer sea-oaths and jargon of a Gunroom, he learned to handle an oar and sail a boat without discredit. The Sub. took him on deck in the dog-watches, and punched into him the rudiments of the art of self-defence; and, lastly, under the tutorship of a kindly Paymaster, he came to understand dimly the inner workings of that vast and complex organisation that has its seat in Whitehall, by whose mouths speak the Lords of Admiralty.

His twenty-first birthday confronted him with the ordeal of an examination, which, successfully passed, entitled him to a commission in His Majesty's Fleet with the rank of Assistant Paymaster.

For the next four years he continued to live in the Gunroom, where, by reason of an alleged unholy intimacy with the King's Regulations and Admiralty Instructions, his advice was commonly sought on questions pertaining to the Service. His mode of speech had become precise—as befitted a wielder of the pen in life's battle, and one versed in the mysteries of Naval Correspondence. The ship's Office was his kingdom, where he was Lord of the Ledgers, with a lack of tan on face and hands that told of a sedentary life in confined spaces: not infrequently he wore glasses.

Some day he will become a Paymaster, warden of the money-chest, and answerable for the pay, victualling, and clothing of every man on board. The years will bring three gold rings to his cuff, a Fleet Paymaster's grey hairs, and a nice perception between the digestible and otherwise in matters of diet.

* * * * *

The A.P. leaned back in his chair and threw down his pen: in the glare of the electric light his face looked white and tired. Beside him the Chief Writer sat totalling a column of figures: on deck a bell struck midnight.

"What d'you make it?" asked the A.P. wearily. The Writer named a sum.

"Penny out," replied the A.P. laconically, picking up his pen again. Outside the Office door, where the hammocks of the guard were slung, a Marine muttered in his sleep.

The two great ledgers that lay open on the desk contained the names of every man on board. They were duplicates, worked independently, and by a comparison of the two mistakes could be detected and rectified. Opposite the names were noted the credits of pay and allowances, adjusted for different charges, the period borne, and all particulars affecting the victualling of each man.

”Ah!” The missing penny had been found. ”It’s in the account of that confounded Ordinary Seaman who broke his leave and got seven days cells,” said the A.P. ”No. 215.” He gave a sigh of relief and closed the ledger. Perhaps he experienced something of the satisfaction an author might feel on writing the magic word ”Finis.” It was his creation, every word and figure of it, working as irrevocably as Destiny towards its appointed end: and on the morrow eight hundred men would file past the pay tables, and in less than twenty minutes have received, in coin or postal orders, the balance of pay due to them.

”I’m going to turn in now,” said the A.P. ”We’ll coin to-morrow.”

Now the coins on a Paymaster’s charge are of certain denominations—usually sovereigns, half-sovereigns, florins, shillings, and sixpenny bits. Each man is paid, as a rule, to the nearest shilling, and the odd pence, if any, are carried forward to the succeeding quarter. Thus the pay due to a man is, say, £3, 19s. 4d. He receives three sovereigns, a half-sovereign, four florins, and a shilling; the four pence are brought on to the next ledger. A Paymaster is thus enabled to foretell with some degree of accuracy the number of coins that he must demand from time to time.

Having coined the total amount to be paid out in wages, and ascertained the number of coins of each denomination required, the pay-trays were laid on the desk in the Office. Each tray was made up of compartments large enough to hold a man’s pay.

The Paymaster divested himself of his coat, lit a pipe, and arranged side by side the two bags containing sovereigns and half-sovereigns. The A.P. similarly disposed of the florins and shillings, so that he could reach them easily. They contained the exact total amount required for the payment in the requisite coins.

”Ready, sir?” he asked.

”Right,” said the Paymaster.

The Chief Writer read out the amount due to the first man. Quick as a flash the amount had clinked into the first division of the tray, both officers making mental calculations as to the coins required. For the next half-hour the only sounds in the Office were the voice of the Chief Writer and the tinkle of the coins as each one was slipped into its compartment. In an incredibly short time the piles of gold and silver had melted away; as a tray was filled it was placed in a box and locked up in readiness for the payment. The three faces grew anxious as the piles dwindled and the number of empty compartments lessened.... The last total was reached: the Paymaster threw down two sovereigns; the A.P. added a florin and a shilling. The bags were empty: would it ”pan out”?

”Two pounds three,” read out the Chief Writer, craning his neck to see the result.

”Thank the Lord,” murmured the A.P.

* * * * *

On the quarter-deck, facing aft, the ship's company were mustered: seamen, stokers, artisans, cooks, and police, one after another, as their names were called by the A.P., stepped briskly up to the pay table, where the Captain and the Commander stood, scooped their wages into their caps and hurried away. The Marines followed, receiving their pay in their hands, with a click of the heels and a swinging salute.

At the break of the forecastle an Ordinary Seaman stood regarding a few silver coins in his grimy palm. Having broken his leave during the month and been awarded cells in consequence, he had received considerably less pay than usual—a penalty he had not foreseen and did not understand.

"Bloomin' tizzy-snatcher," he muttered, slipping the coins into his trousers-pocket.

He referred to the A.P.

XIV.

"C/O G.P.O."

The bell above the door of the village post-office tinkled and the Postmistress looked up over her spectacles.

"Is it yourself, Biddy?"

A barefooted country girl with a shawl over her head entered and shyly tendered an envelope across the counter.

"Can you tell me how much it will be, Mrs Malone?" she queried. There was anxiety in the dark-blue eyes.

The Postmistress glanced at the address. "Sure, it'll go for a penny," she said reassuringly.

"That's a terrible long way for a penny," said the girl. "Sure, it's a terrible long way."

From under her shawl she produced a coin and stamped the envelope. It took some time to do this, because a good deal depended on the exact angle at which the stamp was affixed. In itself it carried a message to the recipient.

"It's grand writin' ye've got," said the Postmistress, her Celtic sympathy aroused. "An' himself will be houldin' it in his hands a month from now."

The girl blushed. ”Father Denis is after learnin’ me; an’ please for a bit o’ stamp-paper, Mrs Malone,” she pleaded softly, ”the way no one will be after opening it an’ readin’ it in them outlandish parts.” It was the seal of the poor, a small square of stamp-paper gummed over the flap of the envelope.

As she was concluding this final rite the bell tinkled again. A fair-haired girl in tweeds, carrying a walking-stick, entered with a spaniel at her heels.

She smiled a greeting to both women. ”A penny stamp, please, Mrs Malone.” She stamped a letter she carried in her hand, and turned the face of the envelope towards the Postmistress. ”How long is this going to take getting to its destination?”

The Postmistress beamed. ”Sure, himself—” she began, and recollected herself. ”A month, me lady—no more.” Outside, the girl with the shawl over her head was standing before the slit of the post-box; the other girl came out the next moment, and the two letters started on their long journey side by side. As the two women turned to go, their eyes met for an instant: the country girl blushed. They went their way, each with a little smile on her lips.

* * * * *

The Destroyer, that for three hours had been slamming through a head sea, rounded the headland and came in sight of the anchored Fleet.

The Yeoman of Signals on the Flagship’s bridge closed his glass with a snap. ”She’s got mails for the Fleet,” he called to the Leading Signalman. ”I’ll report to the Flag-Lieutenant.” As he descended to the quarterdeck he met the Officer of the Watch.

”Destroyer coming in with mails, sir.” The Lieutenant’s face brightened; he called an order to the Boatswain’s Mate, who ran forward piping shrilly. ”A-wa-a-ay picket-boat!” he bawled.

The Flag-Lieutenant was reading in his cabin when the Yeoman made his report. Snatching up his cap, he hastened in to the Admiral’s apartments. ”Destroyer arriving with mails for the Fleet, sir.” The Admiral glanced at the calendar. ”Ah! Eight days since we had the last. Thank you.”

The Flag-Lieutenant poked his head inside the Secretary’s Office. ”Now you fellows will have something to do—the mail’s coming in!”

”Thank you,” replied the Secretary’s Clerk. ”But, Flags, *try* not to look quite so inanely pleased about it. She’s probably forgotten all about you by now.”

The Destroyer with rime-crusted funnels drew near, and men working on the upper decks of the Fleet ceased their labours to watch her approach. One of the side-party, working over the side in a bowline, jerked his paint-brush in her direction. ”If I don’t get no letter this mail—so ’elp me I stops me ’arf pay,” he con-

fided grimly to a ”Raggie,” and spat sententiously. In the Wardroom the married officers awoke from their afternoon siesta and began to harass the Officer of the Watch with inquiries. The news spread even to the Midshipmen’s Schoolplace, and the Naval Instructor found straightway that to all intents and purposes he was lecturing on Spherical Trigonometry to deaf adders.

With the eyes of the Fleet upon her, the Destroyer anchored at last, and the Flagship’s picket-boat slid alongside to embark the piles of bloated mail-bags. As she swung round on her return journey the Yeoman on the Flagship’s bridge glanced down at a signal-boy standing beside the flag-lockers, and nodded. Two flags leaped from the lockers and sped to the masthead. Instantly an answering flutter of bunting appeared on each ship.

”Send boats for mails.” The Flagship had spoken.

* * * * *

In Wardroom and Gunroom a rustling silence prevailed. Each new-comer as he entered rushed to the letter-rack and hurriedly grabbed his pile of letters: there is a poignant joy in seeing one’s name on an envelope twelve thousand watery miles away from home, no matter whose hand penned the address. In some cases, though, it mattered a good deal.

The Flag-Lieutenant retired to his cabin like a dog with a bone, and became engrossed with closely-written sheets that enclosed several amateur snapshots. One or two portrayed a slim, fair-haired girl in tweeds; others a black spaniel. The Flag-Lieutenant studied them through a magnifying-glass, smiling.

The Admiral, busy over his private correspondence, was also smiling. He had been offered another group of letters to tack after his name (he had five already). The agent of his estate at home had a lot to say about the pheasants.... His wife sprawled an account of life at Aix across eight pages. He had been invited to be the executor of one man’s will and godfather to another’s child. But a series of impressionist sketches by his youngest daughter (*ætat.* 5), inspired by a visit to the Zoo, was what he was actually smiling over.

Up on the after-bridge the Yeoman of the Watch leaned over the rail and whistled to the signal-boy. ”Nip down to my mess an’ see if there’s a letter for me.”

The boy fled down the ladder and presently returned with a letter. The Yeoman took it from him and turned it over in his hands, scanning it almost hungrily.

The stamp was cryptically askew and the flap of the envelope ornamented by a fragment of stamp-paper.

”An’ what the ’ell are *you* grinnin’ at?” he began. The boy turned and

scampered down the ladder into safety. The Yeoman of Signals stood looking after him, the letter held in his hand, when a bell rang outside the signal-house. He put his ear to the voice-pipe. The Flag-Lieutenant was speaking.

"Yes, sir?"

"Make the following signal to the Destroyer that brought our mails—

"To Commanding Officer. Admiral requests the pleasure of your company to dinner to-night at eight o'clock."

"Aye, aye, sir." He turned away from the voice-pipe. "*An'* 'e could 'ave my tot on top o' that for the askin'."

XV.
THE "LOOK-SEE."

SOUTHEND, AUGUST 1909.

A bunting-draped paddle-steamer, listed over with a dense crowd of trippers, thrashed her leisurely way down the lines. On the quarterdeck of one of the Battleships the Midshipman of the Afternoon Watch rubbed the lense of his telescope with his jacket cuff, adjusted the focus against a stanchion, and prepared to make the most of this heaven-sent diversion. Over the water came a hoarse roar of cheering, and, as she drew near, handkerchiefs and flags fluttered along the steamer's rail. The Lieutenant of the Watch, in frock-coat and sword-belt, paused beside the Midshipman and raised his glass, a dry smile creasing the corners of his eyes.

"What's up with them all, sir?" murmured the boy delightedly. "My Aunt! What a Banzai!"

"Ever seen kids cheer a passing train? Same sort of thing."

"But look at the girl in white; she's half off her chump—look at her waving her arms.... Friend of yours, sir?"

"No—only hysterical. The man with her is trying to make her stop." The sailor laughed. "He's given it up ... now he's waving too—what at?" He closed his glass. "Curious, isn't it?"

The steamer passed on, and a confused burr of cheering announced that she had reached the next silent warship. "It's all-same 'Maffick,'" he continued

presently, ”Entente—Banzai—anything you like to call it. An’ when we’ve gone they’ll come to their senses and feel hot all over—like a fellow who wakes up and finds his hat on the gas-bracket and his boots in the water-jug!”

The Midshipman nodded: ”I saw some kids dancing round a policeman once. Made the bobby look rather an ass—though as a matter of fact I believe he rather liked it. Bad for discipline, though,” he added with the austere judgment of eighteen summers.

A launch bumped alongside, and a stout man in the stern-sheets shouted for permission to come on board.

”Do,” said the Lieutenant gravely. The stout man took a valedictory pull at a black bottle in the stern-locker, pocketed a handful of shrimps for future consumption, and, accompanied by three feminine acquaintances, laboriously ascended the ladder. They gazed stolidly and all uncomprehending at the sleek barbette guns, the snowy planking underfoot, over which flickered the shadow of the White Ensign, and finally wandered forward through the screen-doors, where they were lost to view among the throngs of sightseers.

The afternoon wore on; every few minutes a launch or steamer swirled past, gay with bunting and parasols. Many carried bands, and in the lulls of cheering the light breeze bore the notes of martial, if not strictly appropriate, music across the line. An Able Seaman paused in his occupation of burnishing the top of the after-capstan, and passed the back of his hand across his forehead.

”Proper dizzy, ain’t they?” he remarked in an undertone to a companion. ”Wot’s the toon?”

”Sons of the Muvverland,” replied the other. He sucked his teeth appreciatively, after the manner of sailor-men, and added, ”Gawd! Look at them women!...”

A launch with a crimson banner, bearing the name of a widely-circulated halfpenny paper, fussed under the stern. A man in a dingy white waistcoat hailed the quarter-deck in the vernacular through a megaphone.

”No, thank you,” came the clear-cut reply; ”we have to-day’s papers.” The Lieutenant hitched his glass under his arm and resumed his measured walk. ”I’m no snob, Lord knows,” he confided to the other, ”but it bores me stiff to be patted on the head by the halfpenny press— Sideboy! pick up those shrimps’ heads that gentleman dropped.”

By degrees the more adventurous spirits found their way down between decks, where, in a short time, the doorway of each officer’s cabin framed a cluster of inquisitive heads. In one or two cases daring sightseers had invaded the interiors, and were examining with naïve interest the photographs, Rugby caps, dented cups, and all the *lares atque penates* of a Naval Officer.

”’Ere, Florrie!” called a flushed maiden of Hebraic mien, obtruding her head

into the flat, ”come an’ look!” She extended a silver photograph frame,—”Phyllis Dare—signed an’ all!”

The other sighed rapturously and examined it with round-eyed interest. Then she gazed round the tiny apartment. ”*Ain’t* ’e a one! Look at ’is barf ’anging on the roof!...”

The harassed sentry evicted them with difficulty.

”Better’n Earl’s Court, this is,” opined a stout lady, who, accompanied by a meek-looking husband and three children, had subsided on to a Midshipman’s sea-chest. She opened the mouth of a string-bag. ”Come on, ’Orace—you just set down this minute, an’ you shall ’ave ’arf a banana.”

A very small Midshipman approached the chest. ”I hate disturbing you, and Horace,” he ventured, ”but I want to go ashore, and all my things are in that box you’re sitting on—would you mind...?”

”Ma!” shrilled a small boy, indicating the modest brass plate on the lid of the chest they had vacated. ”Look—” he extended a small, grubby forefinger, ”’e’s a Viscount!”

”Garn,” snapped his father, ”that’s swank, that is. Viscounts don’ go sailorin’—they stops ashore an’ grinds the faces of the poor, an’ don’ forget what I’m tellin’ of you.”

The Marine Sentry overheard. ”Pity they don’ wash ’em as well,” he observed witheringly. His duties included that of servant to the Midshipman in question, and he resented the scepticism of a stranger who sat on the lid of his master’s chest eating cold currant pudding out of a string-bag.

* * * * *

On the pier-head a dense perspiring crowd surged through gates and barriers, swarmed outward into all the available space, and slowly congested into a packed throng of over-heated, over-tired humanity. Those nearest the rails levelled cheap opera-glasses at the distant line of men-of-war stretching away into the haze, each ship with her attendant steamer circling round her. An excursion steamer alongside hooted deafeningly, and a man in a peaked cap on her bridge raised his voice above the babel, bellowing hoarse incoherencies. A gaitered Lieutenant clanked through the crowd, four patrol-men at his heels, moving as men do who are accustomed to cramped surroundings.

At the landing-stages, where the crowd surged thickest, the picket-boats from the Fleet swung hooting alongside, rocking in the swell. As each went astern and checked her way, the front of the excited throng of sightseers bellied outward, broke, and poured across the boats in a wild stampede for seats. They swayed on the edge of the gunwales, floundered hobnailed over enamelled

casings, were clutched and steadied on the heaving decks by barefooted, half-contemptuous men. The Midshipmen raised their voices in indignant protest: drunk and riotous liberty-men they understood: one "swung-off" at them in unfettered language of the sea, or employed the butt-end of a tiller to back an ignored command on which their safety depended. But here was a people that had never known discipline—had scorned the necessity for it in their own unordered lives. The Midshipman of the inside pinnace jerked the lanyard of the syren savagely. "Look at my priceless paintwork! look at—*That's* enough—no more in this boat—it's not safe! Please stand back, it's—oh, d——!"

A man, in utter disregard of the request, had picked up a child in his arms and jumped on board, steadying himself by the funnel guys. "Orl right, my son, don't bust yerself," he replied pleasantly.

* * * * *

An old woman forced her way through the crush towards the Lieutenant of the Patrol, who with knotted brows was trying to grasp the gist of a signal handed to him by a coastguard.

"I want to see my 'usband's nephew," she explained breathlessly; "'e's in 39 Mess." The Lieutenant smiled gravely. "What ship?" She named the ship, and stood expectant, a look of confidence on her heated features, as if awaiting some sleight-of-hand trick. There was something dimly prophetic in the simple faith with which she voiced her need.

"I see. Will you excuse me a minute while I answer this signal, and I'll send some one to help you find the right boat."

A Petty Officer guided her eventually to the landing-place and saw her safely embarked; he returned to find his Lieutenant comforting with clumsy tenderness a small and lacrymose boy who had lost his parents, turning from him to receive the reproaches of a lady whose purse had been stolen. The two men exchanged a little smile, and the Petty Officer edged a little nearer—

"'Arf an hour on the parade-ground at Whale Island,[#] sir, I'd like to 'ave with some of 'em," he confided behind a horny palm. The jostling throng surged round him, calling high heaven to witness the might of its possessions.

[#] The hotbed of Naval Discipline.

”*I’d* make ’em ’op...” he murmured dreamily.

XVI.

”WATCH THERE, WATCH!”

Dinner in the long, antler-hung mess-room of the Naval Barracks had come to an end. Here and there along the table, where the shaded lights glinted on silver loving-cups and trophies, a few officers lingered in pairs over their coffee. Presently the band moved down from the gallery that overlooked one end of the Mess, and began playing in the hall. This was the signal for a general move to the smoking-room, where a score of figures in mess undress uniform were grouped round the fire, lighting pipes and cigars and exchanging mild, after-dinner chaff.

A few couples of dancing enthusiasts were solemnly revolving in the hall. Others made their way up the broad staircase to the billiard-room, or settled down at the bridge tables.

”Come on,” shouted a tall Commander seated on the ”club” fender in the smoking-room, ”what about a game of skill or chance? Come up to the billiard-room, and bring your pennies!” He stirred a form recumbent in an arm-chair with the toe of his boot. ”What about you, young feller? Are you going to play pool?”

The young Lieutenant shook his head. ”Not to-night, sir, thanks. I’m going to bed early: I’ve got the Night Guard trip.”

Gradually the room emptied. The figure in the arm-chair finished the paper he was reading, glanced at the clock and rose, knocking the ashes out of his pipe. ”Call me at 1.15,” he said to the hall porter as he passed him on his way to his room.

An officer, immaculate in evening dress, who was putting his overcoat in the hall, overheard the speaker, and laughed. ”That’s the spirit! Early to bed, early to rise, makes a man healthy, wealthy, and wise!”

”More’n you’ll ever be, my sprig o’ fashion,” grumbled the Lieutenant, and passed on.

* * * * *

The Lieutenant of the Night Guard went cautiously down the wooden steps of the Barracks’ Pier that led to the landing-place. Cautiously, because the tide was

low, and experience had taught him that the steps would be slippery with weed. Also the night was very dark, and the lights of the steamboat alongside showed but indistinctly through the surrounding fog. At the bottom of the steps one of the boat's crew was waiting with a lantern. Its rays lit for a minute the faces of the two men, and gleamed on the steel guard of the cutlass at the bearer's hip.

"Infernal night!" said the Lieutenant from the depths of his overcoat collar. He had just turned out, and there was an exceeding bitterness in his voice. The lantern-bearer also had views on the night—possibly stronger views—but refrained from any reply. Perhaps he realised that none was expected. The other swung himself down into the sternsheets of the boat, and, as he did so, the Coxswain came aft, blowing on his hands.

"Carry on, sir?"

"Please. Usual rounds: go alongside a Destroyer and any ship that doesn't hail. Fog's very thick: got a compass?"

"There's a compass in the boat, sir." The Coxswain moved forward again to the wheel, wearing a slightly ruffled expression which, owing to the darkness and the fact that there was no one to see it, was rather wasted. For thirty years he'd known that harbour, man and boy, fair or foul, and his father a waterman before him.... He jerked the telegraph bell twice, gave a half-contemptuous turn to the wheel, and spat overside.

"Compass!" he observed to the night.

The boat slid away on its mission, and the shore lights glimmered wan and vanished in the fog astern. A clock ashore struck the hour, and from all sides came the answering ships' bells—some near, some far, all muffled by the moisture in the heavy atmosphere.

Ding-ding! Ding! Half-past one.

He who had borne the lantern deposited it in the tiny cabin aft, and with a thoughtful expression removed a frayed halfpenny paper from the inside of the breast of his jumper. To carry simultaneously a cutlass and a comic paper did not apparently accord with his views on the fitness of things, for he carefully refolded the latter and placed it under the cushions of the locker. Then he unhooked a small megaphone from the bulkhead, and came out, closing the sliding-door behind him. Finally he passed forward into the bows of the boat, where he remained visible in the glare of the steaming light, his arms crossed on his chest, hands tucked for warmth one under each arm-pit, peering stolidly into the blackness ahead.

Once in mid-stream the fog lessened. Sickly patches of light waxed out of indistinctness and gleamed yellow. Anon as they brightened, a human voice, thin and lonely as a wraith's, came abruptly out of the night.

"Boat ahoy!" The voice from nowhere sounded like an alarm. It was as if

the darkness were suddenly suspicious of this swiftly-moving, palpitating thing from across the water. The figure in the bows removed his hands from his armpits, picked up the megaphone, and sent a reassuring bellow in the direction of the hail.

"Guard Boat!" he answered, and as he did so a vast towering shape had loomed up over them. "Answer's, 'Guard Boat!' sir," said the faint voice somewhere above their heads, addressing an unseen third person. A dark wall appeared, surmounted by a shadowy superstructure and a giant tripod mast that was swallowed, long before the eye could reach its apex, in vapour and darkness. The sleek flanks of guns at rest showed for an instant.... A sleeping "Super-Dreadnought." It faded into the darkness astern; then nothing but the mist again, and the throb of the boat's engines.

Another, and another, and yet another watchful Presence loomed up out of the night, hailed suspiciously, and, at the megaphone's answering bellow, merged again into the silent darkness. A figure stepped aft in the Guard Boat and adjusted the tarpaulin that covered the rifles lying on top of the cabin: moisture had collected among the folds in little pools. Then the engine-room gong rang, and a voice quite near hailed them. A long black shadow appeared abreast, and the Guard Boat slid alongside a Destroyer at anchor. The dark water between the two hulls churned into foam as the boat reversed her engines. A tall figure holding a lantern leaned over the Destroyer's rail.

"Night Guard," said the Lieutenant curtly. As he came forward, three men climbed silently up from below and stood awaiting orders at his side. The lantern shone unsteadily on their impassive faces.

"Are you the Quartermaster?"

"Yessir." The tall man in oilskins leaning over the Destroyer's rail lowered his lantern.

"All right, I won't come inboard. All correct?"

"All correct, sir."

"Right. Put it in the log that I've visited you. Good-night."

"Good-night, sir."

The gong clanged, and the Guard Boat slid away into the mist again. The figure in the bows was relieved by a comrade, and together with the remaining two vanished down the foremost hatch. The faint reek of Navy tobacco drifted aft to the stern-sheets, where the Lieutenant of the Night Guard had resumed his position, leaning against an angle of the cabin with his hands deep in the pockets of his overcoat. He was reflecting on the strangeness of a profession that dragged a man from his bed at one o'clock in the morning, to steam round a foggy harbour in the company of armed men, these times of piping peace.

Once a night throughout the year, in every Dockyard Port in the kingdom,

a launch slid away from the Depot jetty, slipped in and out among the anchored ships, and returned to her moorings when the patrol was completed. Why? Some grim significance surely lay in the duty, in the abrupt hails that stabbed the stillness, greeting the throb of her engines: in the figure of the armed man in the bows with the megaphone, ready to fling back the reassuring answer....

He shifted his position and glanced forward. The bowman was chewing tobacco, and every now and again turned his head to spit overside. Each time he did so the port bow-light lit his features with a ruddy glare. It was a stolid countenance, slightly bored.

The Lieutenant smiled gravely. Did the figure wonder why he wore a cutlass in peace time? Did he realise the warning it embodied—the message they conveyed night by night to the anchored ships? His thoughts took a more sombre turn. Would the night ever come—just such a night as this—and under the fog a Menace glide in among the blindfold Fleet? To the first hail of alarm answer with a lever released, a silvery shadow that left a trail of bubbles on the surface.... And then—the fog and silence riven to the dark vault of heaven.

He raised his head. ”All right, Coxswain, enough for to-night. Carry on back.” Over went the helm: the boat swung round on a new course, heading whence she had come an hour before.

Carry on back! It was so easy to say.

His thoughts reverted to the grim picture his imagination had created. How would that shadowy Terror, her mission fulfilled, ”carry on back”? Wheel wrenched over, funnels spouting flame, desperate men clinging to the rail as she reeled under the concussion, racing blindly through the outraged night for safety.

Thus had a warring Nation written a lesson across the map of Manchuria for all the world to read—and, if they might, remember.

Where did he come in, then—this figure leaning thoughtfully against the angle of the steamboat’s cabin? What was his mission, and that of the steamboat with its armed crew, night after night, in fog and by starlight, winter and summer...?

A chord of memory vibrated faintly in his mind. There was a phrase that summed it up, learned long ago.... He was a cadet again on the seamanship-deck of the old *Britannia*, at instruction in a now obsolete method of sounding with the Deep-Sea Lead and Line. They were shown how, in order to obtain a sounding, a number of men were stationed along the ship’s side, each holding a coil of the long line. As the heavy lead sank and the line tautened from hand to hand, each man flung his coil overboard. As he did so he called to warn the next—

”Watch there, watch!”

The steamboat, slowed as she passed close under the stern of a battleship. The fog had lifted, and the Officer of the Middle Watch was leaning over the

quarter-deck rail. The Lieutenant of the Night Guard raised his head, and in the gleam of the ship's stern light the two officers recognised each other. They had been in the *Britannia*, together. The former laughed a greeting.

"Go back to bed, you noisy blighter!"

The cloaked figure in the boat chuckled. "That's where I am going," he called back.

XVII.

"FAREWELL AND ADIEU!"

The Junior Watch-keeper paused at the corner of the street and smote the pavement with the ferrule of his stick.

"Lord!" he ejaculated, "to think this is the last night! Look at it all...." Dusk had fallen, and with it a wet mist closed down on the town. The lights from the shop windows threw out a warm orange glow that was reflected off the wet pavements and puddles in the street. The shrill voice of a paper-boy, hawking the evening paper, dominated all other sounds for a moment. "Eve ... nin' Er-r-rald!" he called. Then, seeing the two figures standing irresolute on the kerb, ran towards them.

"Evenin' 'Erald! sir? Naval 'Pointments, sir ... To-night's Naval 'Point——"

The Lieutenant shook his head half impatiently, then added as if speaking to himself, "No—not yet." It was such a familiar evening feature of life ashore in a Dockyard Port, that hoarse, "jodelling" cry. One bought the paper and glanced through the columns over a gin-and-bitters at the Club. But this was the last night: every familiar sensation and experience should be flavoured in their turn—ere they two went hence and were no more seen!

The Young Doctor at his elbow gave a curt laugh: "We shan't be very interested in the Appointments to-morrow night, Jerry!" An itinerant seller of violets drifted down the pavement and thrust his fragrant merchandise upon them.

"What shall we do first?" asked the Junior Watch-keeper. "Let's go and have our hair cut and a shampoo."

"I hate having my hair cut," pleaded the Surgeon.

"Never mind: it's all part of the show. You won't get another chance of talking football to a barber for years.... And that awful green stuff that he rubs in with a bit of sponge—oh, come on!"

Together they drifted up the familiar street, pausing to stare into shop windows with a sudden renewal of interest that was half pathetic. A jeweller's shop, throwing a glittering white arc of light across the pavement arrested their progress.

"I never realised before," mused the Surgeon, "how these fellows cater for the love-lorn Naval Officer. Look at those brooches: naval crowns; hat-pins made of uniform buttons, bracelets with flags done in enamel—D-E-A-R-E-S—" he spelt out, and broke off abruptly, "Pouf! What tosh!"

The other was fumbling with the door-latch. "Half a minute, Peter, there's something I've just remembered..." and vanished inside muttering. The Young Doctor caught the words "some little thing," and waited outside. The traffic of the street, a fashionable shopping street in a Dockyard town at 6 P.M., streamed past him as he stood there waiting. Girls in furs, with trim ankles, carrying parcels or Badminton raquets, hurried along, pausing every now and again to glance into an attractive shop window. Several tweed-clad figures, shouldering golf clubs, passed in the direction of the railway station; one or two nodded a salutation as they recognised him. Little pigtailed girls with tight skirts enclosing immature figures, of a class known technically as the "Flapper," drifted by with lingering, precocious stares. The horns of the motors that whizzed along the muddy street sounded far and near. They, together with the clang and rumble of tram-cars a few streets away, and the voices of the paper-boys, dominated in turn all other sounds in the mirky night air. The man with the basket of violets shuffled past again, and left a faint trail of fragrance lingering. Long after that night, in the uttermost parts of the earth he remembered it, and the half-caught scent of violets, drifting from a perfume shop in Saigon, was destined to conjure up for the Surgeon a vision of that glittering street, with its greasy pavement and hurrying passers-by, and of a pair of grey eyes that glanced back for an instant over their owner's furs....

The Junior Watch-keeper reappeared, buttoning up his coat. "Sorry to have kept you waiting, Peter," and fell into step beside his companion.

Half an hour later they emerged from the hairdresser's establishment, clipped and anointed as to the head.

"Now," breathed the Lieutenant, "where to?"

"Sawdust Club!" said the Surgeon. They crossed the road and turned up a narrow passage-way. As they quitted the street, a diminutive boy, with an old, wizened face and an unnaturally husky voice, wormed his way in under the Young Doctor's elbow, "'Erald, sir? Latest, sir! Naval—" The Surgeon slipped a sixpenny bit into his hand and took the proffered paper, still damp from the press. They entered a long vault-like apartment, its floor strewn with sawdust and long counters and a row of wooden stools extending down each side. Behind

the counters rose tiers of barrels, and in one corner was a sandwich buffet, with innumerable neat piles of sandwiches in a glass case. The place was crowded with customers: a bull-dog sauntered about the floor, nosing among the sawdust for pieces of biscuit. As the new-comers entered several of the inmates, perched on their wooden stools, looked round and smiled a greeting.

"Ah-ha! Last night in England, eh?"

"Yes," replied the Junior Watch-keeper, "the last night." He sniffed the mingled aroma of sawdust, tobacco-smoke, and the faint pungent smell of alcohol. "Good old pot-house! Good old Sawdust Club! Dear, dear, curried egg sandwiches! ... *And* a drop of sherry white-wine 'what the orficers drinks'—yes, in a dock-glass, and may the Lord ha' mercy on us!"

* * * * *

"And now," said the Young Doctor, "a 'chop-and-chips,' I think."

"A mixed-grill," substituted the other. "Kidney and sausage and tomato and all the rest of it. Oh yes, a 'mixed-grill.'"

They entered swing-doors, past a massive Commissionaire, who saluted with a broad smile. "They're askin' for you inside, sir," he whispered jocularly to the Junior Watch-keeper. "Wonderin' when you was comin' along.... Sailin' to-morrow, ain't you, sir?"

Together the "last-nighters" descended a flight of carpeted stairs and entered a subterranean, electric-lit lounge bar. A dozen or more of Naval men were standing about the fireplace and sitting in more or less graceful attitudes in big saddle-bag arm-chairs. The majority were conducting a lively badinage with a pretty, fair-haired girl who leaned over the bar at one end of the room. She smiled a greeting as the new-comers entered, and emerged from her retreat. The Junior Watch-keeper doffed his hat with a low bow and hung it on the stand. Then he bent down, swung her into his arms, and handed her like a doll to the Young Doctor, who in turn deposited her on the lap of a seated Officer reading the evening paper. "Look what I've found."

With a squeal she twisted herself to her feet and retreated behind the bar again, her hands busy with the mysteries of hair-pins.

"Hullo! hullo!" Greetings sounded on all sides. A tall broad-shouldered figure with a brown beard elbowed his way through the crush and smote the Junior Watch-keeper on the breast-bone.

"Dear sakes! Where have you sprung from? I just come from the Persian Gulf, and it's a treat to see a familiar face!"

"We're off to China again to-morrow," said the other, a half-suppressed note of exultation in his voice—"China-side again! Do you remember...?"

The bearded one nodded wistfully. ”Do I not! ... You lucky devils.... Oh, you lucky devils! Here, Molly——”

* * * * *

The waiter sought them presently with the time-honoured formula: ”Your grill’s spoilin’, gentlemen, please,” and they took their places in the mirror-walled grill-room, where the violins were whimpering some pizzicato melody. A girl with dark eyes set a shade obliquely in a pale face, seated at the grand piano, looked across as they entered and smiled a faint greeting to the Young Doctor.

”I think we’re entitled to a voluntary from the pianist to-night,” said the other presently, his mouth full of mixed-grill. ”What shall we ask for?”

The other thought for a moment. ”There’s a thing ... I don’t know what it’s called ... it’s like wind in the leaves—*she* knows.” He beckoned a waiter and whispered. The girl with the pale face looked across the room and for an instant met the eyes of the Young Doctor; then she ran her fingers lightly over the keys and drifted into Sinding’s *Frühlingsrauschen*.

The Surgeon nodded delightedly. ”That’s the thing.... Good girl. I don’t know what it’s called, but it reminds me of things.” He munched cheerfully, pausing anon to bury his face in a tankard of beer, and they fell to discussing prospects of sport up the Yangtse. Once or twice as she played, the girl behind the piano allowed her dark eyes to travel across the crowded grill-room over the heads of the diners, and her glance lingered a moment at the table where the two ”last-nighters” were seated. The first violin, who was also a musician, sat with a rapt expression, holding his fiddle across his knees. When the piece was over he started abruptly—so abruptly it was evident that for him a spell had broken. He looked up at the pianist with a queer, puzzled expression, as if half-resentful of something.

The Young Doctor was arranging forks and a cruet-stand in a diagram on the table-cloth. ”There was a joss-house here, if you remember, and the guns were here ... the pigeon came over that clump of bamboo....” The other, leaning across the table, nodded with absorbed interest.

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The Lieutenant glanced at his watch. ”Come along; we must be moving if we’re going to the ’Palace.’” They paid their bill, tipped the waiter in a manner that appeared to threaten him with instant dislocation of the spine, and walked up the tiled passage that led past the open door of the lounge. From her vantage behind the bar inside, the girl some one had addressed as ”Molly” caught a glimpse of their retreating figures. She slipped out through the throng of customers, most of whom had dined, and were talking to each other over their port

and liqueurs, into the quiet of the corridor.

"Jerry!" she called; "Mr——"

"Lord!" ejaculated the Junior Watch-keeper, "I'd forgotten—" He turned quickly on his heel. "Hullo, Molly! We're coming back presently. But that reminds me..." he fumbled in his waistcoat pocket, and the Surgeon strolled slowly on up the steps, round a bend, and was lost to view.

The girl gave a little breathless laugh. "That's what you all say, you boys. And you never do come back.... *You* weren't going without saying good-bye to me, were you?"

"No, no, Molly, of course I wasn't: and look here, old lady, here's a gadget I got for you—" he fumbled with the tissue paper enclosing a little leather case.

The girl stood with one hand on the lapel of his coat, twisted a button backwards, and forwards. "Jerry, I—I wanted to thank you ... you were a real brick to me, that time. It saved my life, goin' to the Sanatorium, an' I couldn't never have afforded it...." Her careful grammar became a shade confused.

The man gave a little, deep laugh of embarrassment. "Rot! Molly, that's all over and forgotten. No more nasty coughs now, eh?" He patted her shoulder clumsily.

"An' mind you drop me a line when that fathom of trouble of yours comes up to the scratch, and send me a bit of wedding-cake—here, hang on to this thing.... No, it's nothing; only a little brooch.... Good-bye, old lady—good-bye. Good luck to you, and don't forget to——"

The girl raised her pretty, flushed face and gave a quick glance up and down the deserted corridor. "Ain't you—aren't you going to—say good-bye ... properly—Jerry?"

The Junior Watch-keeper bent down. "'Course ... and another for luck...! Good-bye, dear; good-bye...!"

The Young Doctor was waiting with his nose flattened against the darkened window of a gunsmith's opposite when the Lieutenant joined him. His silence held a vague hint of disapproval as they fell into step. "That girl," he ventured presently, "isn't she a bit fond of you, old thing?"

The Junior Watch-keeper paused to light a pipe. "I—I don't think so, Peter. Not more than she is of a dozen others." He glanced at his companion: "You don't think I've been up to any rotten games, do you?" The other shook his head with quick protest. "But I like her awfully, and she's a jolly good little sport. They all are, taking them all round, in a Naval Port. It's a rotten life when you think of it ... cooped up there in that beastly atmosphere, year in, year out, listening to everlasting Service shop, or being made love to by half-tight fools. Their only refuge from it is in marriage—if they care to take advantage of some young ass. Who else do they meet...? The marvel of it is not that a few come to grief, but

that so many are so jolly straight. That girl to-night—Molly—I suppose she has refused half a dozen N.O.'s. Prefers to wait till some scallywag in her own class can afford to take her away out of it. And I've heard her talking like a Mother to a rorty Midshipman—a silly young ass who was drinking like a fish and wasting his money and health pub-crawling. She shook him to the core. Lord knows, I don't want to idealise barmaids—p'raps I'd be a better man if I'd seen less of them myself—but——"

The Surgeon gripped his elbow soothingly. "I know—*I* know, old son. Don't get in a stew! And as for seeing less of them ... it's hard to say. Unless a man knows people ashore, and is prepared to put on his 'superfine suitings' and pay asinine calls when he might be playing golf or cricket, where else is he to speak to a woman all the days of his life? Dances...? I can't dance."

They had turned into the main thoroughfare, and the traffic that thronged the pavements and roadway made conversation difficult. The liberty men from scores of ships in the port streamed to and fro: some arm-in-arm with quietly-dressed servant girls and shop girls; others uproarious in the company of befeathered women. At short intervals along the street a flaring gin-palace or cinema-theatre flung smudges of apricot-coloured light on to the greasy pavements and the faces of passers-by. Trams clanged past, and every now and again a blue-jacket or military foot-patrol, belted and gaitered, moved with watchful eyes and measured gait along the kerb.

As they neared the music-hall the throng grew denser. On all sides the West Country burr filled the night, softening even the half-caught oath with its broad, kindly inflection. Men from the garrison regiments mingled with the stream of blue-clad sailors. A woman hawking oranges from the kerb raised her shrill voice, thrusting the cheap fruit under the noses of passers-by. A group of young Stokers, lounging round a vendor of hot chestnuts, were skylarking with two brazen-voiced girls. At the doorway of the music-hall, a few yards away, a huge man in livery began to bawl into the night, hoarsely incoherent.

The two officers mounted the steps together, and, as one obtained tickets from the booking-office, the other turned with a little smile to look down the mile-long vista of lights and roaring humanity. The scintillant tram-cars came swaying up the street from the direction of the Dockyard: on either side the gleaming windows of the shops that still remained open—the tattooists, the barbers, tobacconists, the fried-fish and faggot shops, and the host of humbler tradesmen who plied most of their trade at this hour—grew fainter and duller, until they dwindled away to a point under the dark converging house-tops. A girl, shouting some shameless jest, broke away from the horse-play round the chestnut-oven, and thrust herself, reeling with laughter, through the passing crowd. A burly Marine caught her by the waist as she wriggled past, and kissed her dexterously

without stopping in his stride. His companion smirked appreciation of the feat, and glanced back over his shoulder....

The watcher on the steps turned and followed the other up the broad stairway.

* * * * *

A man with a red nose and baggy trousers was singing a song about his mother-in-law and a lodger. His accents were harshly North Country, and out of the paint-streaked countenance, his eyes—pathetic, brown monkey-eyes—roamed anxiously over the audience, as if even he had little enough confidence in the humour of his song.

The Lieutenant leaned back in his seat and refilled his pipe. "Isn't it wonderful to think that when we come home again in three years' time that chap with the baggy trousers and red nose—or his twin-brother, anyhow—will still be singing about the same old mother-in-law!"

Presently a stout, under-clad woman skipped before the footlights and commenced some broadly suggestive patter. The audience, composed for the most part of blue-jackets and Tommies, roared delight at each doubtful sally. She ended with a song that had a catchy, popular refrain, and the house took it up with a great burst of song.

"Hark at 'em!" whispered the Surgeon. "Don't they love it all! Yet her voice is nothing short of awful, her song means nothing on earth, and her anatomy—every line of it—ought to be in the museum of the Royal College of Surgeons.... Let's go and have a drink."

They ascended the stairway to the promenade, and passed under a curtain-hung archway into a long bar. The atmosphere was clouded with tobacco smoke, and reeked of spirits and cheap, clinging scent. From a recess in one corner a gramophone blared forth a modern rag-time, and a few women, clasped by very callow-looking youths, were swaying to a "One-step" in the middle of the carpeted space. Behind the bar two tired-looking girls scurried to and fro, jerking beer handles as if for a wager, and mechanically repeating orders. Settees ran the length of the walls under rows of sporting prints, and here more women, with painted lips and over-bright, watchful eyes, were seated at little tables. Most of them were accompanied by young men in lounge or tweed suits.

"Phew," grunted the Junior Watch-keeper, "what an atmosphere! Look at those young asses.... Kümmel at this time of night.... And we did it once, Peter! Lord! it makes me feel a hundred."

A panting woman disengaged herself from her youthful partner, and linked her arm within that of the Young Doctor. "Ouf!" she gasped, "I'm that 'ot, dearie.

Stand us a drop of wot killed auntie!"

With a gallant bow the Young Doctor led her to the bar. "My dear madam," he murmured—"a privilege! And if you will allow me to prescribe for you—as a Medical Man—I suggest——"

"Port an' lemon," prompted the lady. She fanned herself with a sickly-scented and not over-clean scrap of lace. "Ain't it 'ot, Doctor! ... Glad I lef me furs at 'ome. Ain't you goin' to have nothin'...?"

* * * * *

The Junior Watch-keeper drew a deep breath as they reached the open street.

"Thank God for fresh air again!" He filled and refilled his lungs.

"'And so to bed,'" quoted the other. The taverns and places of amusement were emptying their patrons into the murky street. Raucous laughter and farewells filled the night.

"Yes." The Junior Watch-keeper yawned, and they walked on in silence, each busy with his own long thoughts. By degrees the traffic lessened, until, nearing the Dockyard, the two were alone in deserted thoroughfares with no sound but the echo of their steps. They were threading the maze of dimly-lit, cobbled streets that still lay before them, when a draggle-skirted girl, standing in the shelter of a doorway, plucked at their sleeves. They walked on almost unheeding, when suddenly the Young Doctor hesitated and stopped. The woman paused irresolute for a moment, and then came towards them, with the light from a gas-lamp playing round her tawdry garments. She murmured something in a mechanical tone, and smiled terribly. The Young Doctor emptied his pockets of the loose silver and coppers they contained, and thrust the coins into her palm: with his disengaged hand he tilted her face up to the light. It was a pathetically young, pathetically painted face. "Wish me good luck," he said, and turned abruptly to overtake his companion.

The woman stood staring after them, her hand clenched upon her suddenly acquired riches. An itinerant fried-fish and potato merchant, homeward bound, trundled his barrow suddenly round a distant corner. The girl wheeled in the direction of the sound.

"'Ere!" she called imperiously, "*'ere!...*"

The echo of her voice died away, and the Young Doctor linked his arm within the other's.

"There is a poem by some one[#] I read the other day—d'you know it?—

"'I must go down to the sea again, to the lonely sea and the sky,
And all I ask is a tall ship, and a star to steer her by.'"

[#] John Masefield.

He mused for a moment in silence as they strode along. ”I forget how it goes on: something about a ’vagrant gypsy life,’ and the wind ’like a whetted knife’—

> ”’And all I ask is a merry yarn from a laughing fellow-rover,
> And a quiet sleep and a sweet dream when the long trick’s over.’

”That’s how it ends, I know.”

The Junior Watch-keeper nodded soberly. ”Yes.... But it’s the star we need the most, Peter—you and I.”

* * * * *

It was early in the morning, and thin columns of smoke were rising from the funnels of a cruiser lying alongside one of the Dockyard jetties. On her decks there was a bustle of preparation: steaming covers were being laced to yards and topmasts: the Boatswain, ”full of strange oaths” and of apoplectic countenance, moved forward in the wake of a depressed part of the watch. On the booms the Carpenter was superintending the stowage of some baulks of timber. Packing-cases were coming in at the gangway; barefooted messengers darted to and fro. There was a frequent shrilling of pipes, and the hoarse voice of the Boatswain’s Mate bellowing orders.

Presently there came a lull, and the ship’s company were mustered aft as a bell began to toll. Then over the bared heads the familiar words of the Navy Prayer drifted outward into space.

”... That we may return to enjoy ... the fruits of our labours.” In the course of the next three years, the words, by reason of their frequent repetition, would come to mean to them no more than the droning of the Chaplain’s voice; yet that morning their significance was plain enough to the ranks of silent men. A minute later, with the notes of a bugle, the ship boiled into activity again.

Out on the straw-littered jetty a gradually-increasing crowd had gathered. It was composed for the most part of women, poorly clad, with pinched, anxious faces. Some had babies in their arms; others carried little newspaper parcels tucked under their shawls: parting gifts for some one. A thin drizzle swept in from the sea, as a recovered deserter, slightly intoxicated, was brought down between an escort and vanished over the gangway amid sympathetic murmurs from the onlookers. A telegram boy pushed his way through the crowd, delivered his message of God-speed in its orange-coloured envelope, and departed again,

whistling jauntily.

The men drifted out into the jetty to bid farewell, with forced nonchalance and frequent expectoration. Each man was the centre of a little group of relatives, discussing trivialities with laughter that did not ring quite true. Here and there a woman had broken down, crying quietly; but for the most part they stood dry-eyed and smiling, as befitted the women of a Nation that must be ever bidding "Vale" to its sons.

"All aboard!" The voices of the Ship's Police rose above the murmur of the crowd. Farewells were over.

A hoist of flags crept to the masthead, and an answering speck of colour appeared at the signal halliards over Admiralty House.

"Askin' permission to proceed," said some one. The gang-planks rattled on to the jetty, and a knot of workmen began casting off wires from the bollards.

"Stand clear!" shouted a warning voice. The ropes slid across the tarred planking and fell with a sullen splash. Beneath the stern the water began to churn and boil. The ship was under way at last, gliding farther every minute from the watching crowd. The jetty was a sea of faces and waving handkerchiefs: the band on board struck up a popular tune.

In a few minutes she was too far off to distinguish faces. On the fore bridge the Captain raised his cap by the peak and waved it. Somewhere near the turf-scarped fort ashore an answering gleam of white appeared and fluttered for a moment. The lines of men along the upper deck, the guard paraded aft, the cluster of officers on the bridge, slowly faded into an indistinct blur as the mist closed round them. For a while longer the band was still audible, very far off and faint.

After a while the watchers turned and straggled slowly towards the Dock-yard Gates.

XVIII.

THE SEVENTH DAY.

The Sub-Lieutenant clanked into the Gunroom and surveyed the apartment critically. The Junior Midshipmen stationed at each scuttle fell to burnishing the brass butterfly nuts with sudden and anxious renewal of energy.

"Stinks of beer a bit," observed the Sub., "but otherwise it's all right. Hide that 'Pink 'Un' under the table-cloth, one of you." As he spoke the notes of a bugle

drifted down the hatchway. ”There you are! Officers’ Call! Clear out of it, sharp!” Hastily they tucked away the possible cause of offence to their Captain, bundled their cleaning-rags into a cupboard, snatched their dirks off the rack, and hurried on deck.

On the quarter-deck the remainder of the Officers were assembling in answer to the summons of the bugle. Frock-coated figures clanked to and fro, struggling with refractory white gloves. Under the supervision of a bearded Petty Officer the Quarter-deck men were hurriedly putting the finishing touches to neatly coiled boats’ falls and already gleaming metal-work. It was 9 A.M. on a Sunday forenoon, and the ship was without stain or blemish from her gilded truck to her freshly painted water-line. All the working hours of the previous day—what time the citizen ashore donned ”pearlies” or broadcloth and shut up shop—the blue-jacket had been burnishing and scrubbing,—a lick of paint here, there a scrap of gold-leaf or a pound of elbow-grease. And pervading the ship was the comfortless atmosphere of an organisation, normally in a high state of adjustment, strained yet a point higher.

The Commander came suddenly out of the Captain’s cabin and nodded to the Officer of the Watch.

”Sound off with the bell.”

The buglers, drawn up in line at the entrance to the battery, moistened their lips in anticipation and raised their bugles. The Corporal of the Watch stepped to the bell and jerked the clapper.

Ding-ding!

Simultaneously the four bugles blared out, and the hundreds of men forward in the waist of the ship and on the forecastle formed up into their different divisions and stood easy. The divisions were ranged along both sides of the ship—Forecastle, Foretop, Maintop, Quarter-deck men on one side, Stokers, Day-men, and Marines on the other.

The ”Rig of the Day” was ”Number Ones,” which was attended by certain obligations in the matter of polished boots, carefully brushed hair, and shaven faces. To any one unversed in the mysteries of the sailors’ garb, the men appeared to be dressed merely in loose, comfortably-fitting blue clothes. But a hundred subtleties in that apparently simple dress received the wearer’s attention before he submitted himself to the lynx-eyed inspection of his Divisional Lieutenant that morning. The sit of the blue-jean collar, the spotless flannel, the easy play of the jumper round the hips, the immaculate lines of the bell-bottomed trousers (harder to fit properly than any tail-coat or riding-breeches) all came in for a more critical overhaul than did ever a young girl before her first ball. And the result, in all its pleasing simplicity, was the sailor’s unconscious tribute to that one day of the seven wherein his luckier brethren ashore do no manner of work.

The Captain stepped out of his cabin, and the waiting group of officers saluted. The Heads of Departments made their reports, and then, with an attendant retinue of Midshipmen, Aides-de-Camp, messengers, and buglers, followed the Captain down the hatchway for the Rounds.

Along the mess-decks, deserted save for an occasional sweeper or Ship's Corporal standing at attention, swept the procession; halting at a galley or casemate as the Captain paused to ask a question or pass a white-gloved hand along a beam in search of dust. Then aft again, past Gunroom and Wardroom—with a stoppage outside the former. The Captain elevated his nose.

"I think the beer-barrel must be leaking, sir," said the Sub-Lieutenant, "standing the rounds" in the doorway.

"See to it," was the reply, and the cortége swept on, with swords clanking and lanterns throwing arcs of light into dark corners suspected of harbouring a hastily concealed deck-cloth or of being the pet *cache* for somebody's coaling-suit.

Up in the sunlight of the outer world the band was softly playing selections from "The Pirates of Penzance." The ship's goat, having discovered a white kid glove dropped by the Midshipman of the Maintop, retired with it to the shelter of the boat-hoist engine for a hurried cannibalistic feast. The Officers of Divisions had concluded the preliminary inspection, and were pacing thoughtfully to and fro in front of their men. Suddenly the Captain's head appeared above the after hatchway.

The Lieutenant of the Quarter-deck Division, in the midst of receiving a whispered account of an overnight dance from his Midshipman, wheeled abruptly and called his Division to attention. Then—

"Off hats!"

As if actuated by a single lever each man raised his left hand, whipped off his hat and brought it to his side. The Captain acknowledged the Lieutenant's salute and passed quickly down the ranks, his keen eyes travelling rapidly from each man's face to his boots. Once or twice he paused to ask a question and then passed on to the next waiting Division.

Presently the bugler sounded the "Disperse"; the Divisions turned forward, stepped outward, and broke up. Here and there the Midshipman of a Division remained standing, scribbling hurriedly in his note-book such criticisms as it had pleased his Captain to make. One man's hair had wanted cutting; it was time another had passed for Leading Seaman.... A third had elected to attend Divisions—on this the Sabbath of the Lord his God—without the knife attached to his lanyard.

* * * * *

Half an hour later the normal aspect of the Quarter-deck had changed. Rows of plank benches, resting on capstan bars supported by buckets, filled the available space on each side of the barbette. Chairs for the Officers had been placed further aft, facing the men who were to occupy the benches. In front of the burnished muzzles of the two great 12-inch guns a lectern had been draped with a white flag, and between the guns a 'cello, flute, and violin prepared to augment the strains of a rather wheezy harmonium. Then the bell began to toll, and a flag crept to the peak to inform the rest of the Fleet that the ship was about to commence Divine Service.

The men hurried aft, seamen and marines pouring in a continuous stream through the open doors from the batteries. No sooner had the last man squeezed hurriedly into his place with the slightly hang-dog air seamen assume in the full glare of the public eye, than the Master-at-Arms appeared at the battery door and reported every one aft to the Commander. The Captain took his chair, facing the Ship's Company, and a little in advance of the remainder of the Officers; the Chaplain walked up the hatchway, stepped briskly to the lectern and gave out a hymn. The orchestra played the opening bars, five hundred men swung themselves to their feet, and the service began.

Presently the Captain crossed to the lectern and read the lesson for the day. It dealt with warfare and bloodshed, and there was a suddenly awakened interest in the rows of intent faces opposite—for this was the consummation each man present believed would ultimately come to some day's work, although it might not be amid the welter and crash of shattered chariot and struggling horses, nor the twang of released bow-strings.... And the stern, level voice went on to tell of the establishment of laws, wise and austere as those which regulated the reader's paths and those of his listeners; while under the stern-walk a flock of gulls screeched and quarrelled, and the water lapped with a drowsy, soothing sound against the side of the ship.

After a while the Chaplain gave out the number of another hymn. The Bluejacket's most enthusiastic admirer would hesitate to describe him as a devout man; but when the words and tune are familiar—it may be reminiscent of happier surroundings—the sailor-man will sing a hymn with the fervour of inspiration. And if only for the sake of the half-effaced memories it recalled, the volume of bass harmony that rolled across the sunlit harbour doubtless travelled as far as the thunder of organ and chant from many a cathedral choir.

Then, standing very upright, his fingers linked behind his back, the Chaplain commenced his sermon. He spoke very simply, adorning his periods with no flowery phrase or ornate quotation, suiting the manner of his delivery to the least intelligent of his hearers. There was no fierce denunciation, no sudden gestures nor change in the grave, even voice. He touched on matters not commonly spo-

ken of in pulpits, and his speech was wondrous plain, as indeed was meet for a congregation such as his. And they were no clay under the potter's thumb. Composed for the most part of men indifferent to religion, almost fiercely resentful of interference with their affairs; living on crowded mess-decks afloat, fair game for every crimp and land-shark ashore. But there was that in the sane, temperate discourse that passed beyond creed or dogma, and a tatooed fist suddenly clenched on its owner's hat-brim, or the restless shifting of a foot, told where a shaft passed home.

Here and there, screened by his fellows, a tired man's head nodded drowsily. But the "Padre" had learned twenty years before that it took more than a sermon to keep awake a seated man who had perhaps kept the middle watch, and turned out for the day at 6.15 A.M.; in the five hundred odd pairs of eyes that remained fixed on his face he doubtless read a measure of compensation.

* * * * *

The short-cropped heads bowed as in clear tones the Benediction was pronounced—

"... and remain with you ... always." An instant's pause, and then, Officers and men standing upright and rigid, they sang the National Anthem.

The Captain turned and nodded to the Commander, who was putting on his cap.

"Pipe down."

XIX.

THE PARRICIDE.

"'Ark!" said the hedger, his can of cold tea arrested half-way to his lips. But Sal, the lurcher bitch curled up under the hedge, had heard some seconds before. With twitching nose and ears alert, she jumped out of the ditch and trotted up the road. A far-off sound was coming over the downs—a faint drone as of a clustering swarm of bees.

"One of them motor-bikes——" murmured the man and paused. Away in the west, approaching the coast-line and flying high, was a dark object like the framework of a box suspended in mid-air. It drew near, rising and falling on the

unseen swell of the ocean of ether, and the droning sound grew louder. ”Aerio-plane,” continued the hedger, again speaking aloud, after the manner of those who live much alone in the open.

As a matter of fact it was a Hydro-Aeroplane, and after it had passed overhead the watchers saw it wheel and swoop towards the harbour hidden from them by the shoulder of the downs.

The man stood looking after it, his shadow sprawling across the dusty road before him. ”Lawks!” he ejaculated, ”’ere’s goin’s-on!” A ripple from the Naval Manoeuvre Area had passed across the placid surface of his life. He resumed his interrupted tea.

A stone breakwater stretched a half-encircling arm round the little harbour. Within its shelter a huddle of coasting craft and trawlers lay at anchor, with the red roofs of the town banked up as a background for their tangled spars. Behind them again the tall chimney of an electric power station lifted a slender head.

In the open water of the harbour a flotilla of Submarines were moored alongside one another: figures moved about the tiny railed platforms, and in the stillness of the summer afternoon the harbour held only the sound of their voices, the muffled clink of a hammer, and, from an unseen siding ashore, the noise of shunting railway trucks made musical by distance.

The seaplane drew near and circled gracefully overhead; then it volplaned down and settled lightly on the water at the harbour mouth: a Submarine moved from her moorings to meet it. The pilot of the seaplane pulled off his gauntlets, pushed his goggles up on to his forehead, and lit a cigarette. The Submarine ranged alongside and her Captain leaned over the rail with a smile of greeting.

”Any news?”

The Flying Corps Officer raised his hands to his mouth: ”Enemy’s Battleship and eight Destroyers, eighteen miles to the Sou’-East,” he shouted. ”Steering about Nor’-Nor’-West at 12 knots. Battleship’s got troops or Marines on board in marching order.... No, nothing, thanks—I’m going north to warn them. So-long...”

Five minutes later he was a black speck in the sky above the headland where the tall masts of a Wireless Station and a cluster of whitewashed cottages showed up white against the turf.

The Submarine slid back into the harbour and approached the Senior Officer’s boat. The Senior Officer, in flannels, was swinging Indian clubs on the miniature deck of his craft. The Lieutenant who had communicated with the Seaplane made his report; his Senior Officer nodded and put down his clubs.

”Guessed as much. They’re coming to raid this place. Come inboard for a minute, and tell Forbes and Lawrence and Peters to come too. We’ll have a Council of War—Wow, wow!”

* * * * *

The sun set in a great glory of light; then a faint haze, blue-grey, like a pigeon's wing, veiled the indeterminate meeting of sea and sky. It crept nearer, stealing along the horizon, stretching leaden fingers across the smooth sea.

A fishing smack, becalmed a league from the harbour mouth, faded suddenly like a wraith into nothingness.

Six Destroyers came out of the mist, heading towards the breakwater. They were about a mile away when the leading boat altered course abruptly towards the North, and the others followed close in her wake, leaving a smear of smoke in the still air. Before their wake had ceased to trouble the surface—before, almost, the rearmost boat had vanished into the fog—the periscope of a Submarine slid round the corner of the breakwater, paused a moment as if in uncertainty, and then headed, like a swimming snake, in swift pursuit. Another followed; another, and another.

* * * * *

A Battleship came slowly out of the haze. She moved with a certain deliberate sureness, a grey, majestic citadel afloat. A jet of steam from an escape and the Ensign at her peak showed up with startling whiteness against the sombre sea. An attendant Destroyer hovered on each quarter, but as they neared the land these darted ahead, obedient to the tangle of flags at the masthead of the Battleship. Off the mouth of the harbour they swung round: the semaphore of one signalled that the harbour was clear, and they separated, to commence a slow patrol North and South on the fringe of the mist. A moment later the Battleship anchored with a thunder and rattle of cable. Pipes twittered shrilly, and boats began to sink from her davits into the water. Ladders were lowered, and armed men streamed down the ship's side. They were disembarking troops for a raid.

There was a sudden swirl in the water at the harbour entrance. Unseen, a slender, upright stick, surmounted by a little oblong disc, crept along in the shadow of the breakwater, indistinguishable in the floating debris awash there on the flood tide. It turned seaward and sank.

A minute passed; a cutter full of men was pulling under the stern to join the other boats waiting alongside. The steel derrick, raised like a huge warning finger, swung slowly round, lifting a steamboat out into the water! From the boats afloat came the plash of oars, an occasional curt order, and the rattle of sidearms as the men took their places.

Then a signalman, high up on the forebridge, rushed to the rail, bawling hoarsely.

A couple of hundred yards away the dark stick had reappeared. Almost simultaneously two trails of bubbles sped side by side towards the flank of the Battleship. There was a sudden tense silence. The Destroyer to the Northward sighted the menace and opened fire with blank on the periscope from her 12-pounders.

”Bang! ... Bang! Bang!”

The men in the boats alongside craned their necks to watch the path of the approaching torpedoes. The Commander standing at the gangway shrugged his shoulders and turned with a grim smile to the Captain.

”They’ve bagged us, sir.”

A dull concussion shook the after part of the ship, and the pungent smell of calcium drifted up off the water on to the quarterdeck.

”Yes,” said the Captain. He stepped to the rail, and stood looking down at the spluttering torpedoes with the noses of their copper collision heads telescoped flat, as they rolled drunkenly under the stern.

The Submarine thrust her conning-tower above the surface, and from the hatchway appeared a figure in the uniform of a Lieutenant. He climbed on to the platform with a pair of handflags, and commenced to signal.

The Post-Captain on the quarter-deck of the Battleship raised his glass, made an inaudible observation, and lowered it again.

”Claim-to-have-put-you-out-of-action,” spelt the handflags. The Captain smiled dryly and lifted his cap by the peak with a little gesture of greeting; there was answering gleam of teeth in the sunburnt face of the Lieutenant across the water. The Captain turned to his Commander. ”But he needn’t have torpedoed his own father,” he said, as if in continuation of his last remark. ”The penalty for marrying young, I suppose.”

The Submarine recovered her torpedoes and returned to harbour. Her Commanding Officer summoned his Sub-Lieutenant, and together they delved in a cupboard; followed the explosion of a champagne cork. Glasses clinked, and there was a gurgling silence.

”Not bad work,” said the Sub-Lieutenant, ”bagging your Old Man’s ship.”

”Not so dusty,” replied the Lieutenant in command of the Submarine, modestly.

She was a brand-new Battleship, and had cost a million and three-quarters.

It was his twenty-fourth birthday.

XX.
THE NIGHT-WATCHES.

"Out pipes! Clear up the upper deck!" The Boatswain Mate moved forward along the lee side of the battery repeating the hoarse call. Slowly the knots of tired men broke up, knocking the ashes out of their pipes, or pinching their cigarette-ends with horny fingers before economically tucking the remnants into their caps. A part of the Watch came aft, sweeping down the deck, coiling down ropes for the night. Then, as the bell struck, the shrill wail of the pipe rose again above the sound of the wind and waves. It grew louder and shriller, and died away: then, rising again, changed to another key and ended abruptly. It was the sailor's Curfew—"Pipe down."

On the crowded mess-decks, where scrubbed canvas hammocks swung with the roll of the ship above the mess-tables, the ship's company was turning in. A struggle with a tight-fitting jumper, which, rolled up in company with a pair of trousers, was tucked under the tiny horse-hair pillow; a pat to the mysterious pockets lining the "cholera-belt," to reassure a man that his last month's pay was still intact, and then, with a steadying hand on the steel beam overhead, one after another they swung themselves into their hammocks and fell a-snoring.

Aft in the Gunroom an extra half-hour's lights had been granted in honour of somebody's birthday, and the inmates of the Mess were still gathered round the piano. It was a war-scarred instrument: but it served its purpose, albeit the hero of the evening—in celebration of his advance into the sere and yellow leaf—had emptied a whisky-and-soda into its long-suffering interior. The musician, his features ornamented by a burnt-cork moustache, thumped valiantly at the keys.

"And then there came the Boatswain's Wife,"

roared the young voices. It was an old, old song, familiar to men who were no longer even memories with the singers and their generation. But its unnumbered verses and quaint, old-world jingle had survived unchanged the passing of "Masts and Yards," and were even then being handed on into the era of the hydroplane

and submarine.

"Ten o'clock, gentlemen!" said the voice of the Ship's Corporal at the door. The Sub. eyed him sternly. "You may get yourself a glass of beer, Corporal," and thereby won a five-minutes' respite. Then——

"Out lights, please, gentlemen," again broke in upon the revels.

"Corporal, will you——"

The man shook his head with a grim smile. "Come along, please, gentlemen, or you'll get me 'ung."

Reluctantly the singers withdrew, drifting by twos and threes to the steerage flat where their hammocks swung. The Ship's Corporal switched off the lights and locked the gun-room door. "I likes to see 'igh sperits meself," he admitted to the yawning Steward who accompanied him out of the Mess. The Gunroom Steward's reply was to the effect that you could have too much even of a good thing, and he retired gloomily to the pantry, where, in company with a vast ham and the gunroom crockery, he spent most of his waking hours.

In the nearly deserted Wardroom a rubber of bridge was still in lingering progress; a sea raced frothing past the thick glass of a scuttle, and one of the players raised his eyes from his hand. "Blowing up for a dirty night," he observed. A Lieutenant deep in an arm-chair by the fire lifted his head. "It's sure to—my middle watch." He closed the book he was reading and stood up, stretching himself. Then with a glance at the clock he moved towards the door. As he opened it the Senior Engineer came into the Mess. His face was drawn with tiredness, and there were traces of dust round his eyes. He pulled off a pair of engine-room gloves, and, ordering a drink, thoughtfully rolled a cigarette. At the sound of his voice the Engineer Commander looked up from the game and raised his eyebrows in an unspoken question to his subordinate. The Senior Engineer nodded. "Yes, sir, she's all right now; I don't think she'll give any more trouble to-night." He finished his drink and sought his cabin. He had had three hours' sleep in the last forty-eight hours, and hoped, as he undressed, that the infernal scrap-heap would hold together till he'd had a bit more.

The night wore on, and one by one the inmates of the Wardroom drifted to their respective cabins. Outside the Captain's cabin the sentry beguiled the tedium of the vigil by polishing the buckle of his belt. Every now and again he glanced at the clock.

At last the hands pointed to a quarter to twelve. In fifteen minutes his watch would be over. He buckled on his belt and resumed his noiseless beat. Occasionally from some cabin or hammock the snore of a tired sleeper reached his ears. The rifles, stowed upright round the aft-deck, moved in their racks to the measured roll of the ship, with a long-drawn, monotonous rattle, like a boy's stick drawn lightly across area railings.

A tread sounded overhead, and a figure carrying a lantern came lightly down the hatchway. It was the Midshipman of the First Watch, calling the reliefs. He descended to the steerage flat, and bending down under the hammocks of his sleeping brethren, knocked at the door of one of the cabins. There was a lull in the stertorous breathing, in the warm, dim interior.

"Ten minutes to twelve, sir!" The inmate grunted and switched on his light. "All right," he growled.

The boy moved off till he came to a hammock slung by the armoured door. He ranged up beside it and blew lightly into the face of the sleeper.

"Jimmy! Ten to twelve!"

The occupant of the hammock opened one eye.

"'Ll right," he murmured sleepily, and closed it again.

The Midshipman of the First Watch eyed him suspiciously.

"No you don't!" He shook the hammock. "Wake up, you fat-headed blighter, or I'll slip you." Then, changing his tone to a wheedling one: "Come on, Jimmy, it's a lovely night—much more healthy on the bridge than fugging in your beastly hammock."

His relief said something under his breath, and emerged shivering from the blankets, blinking in the light of the lantern. Once his feet were fairly on the deck, the other turned and scampered up the ladder again.

The bell struck eight times as the Lieutenant and Midshipman of the Middle Watch climbed the ladder to the fore bridge. The Fleet was steaming in two divisions, with a flotilla of destroyers stationed on the beam. Beyond them the silhouette of an island was just visible in the pale moonlight.

At the last stroke of the bell the pipe of the Boatswain's Mate shrilled out, calling the Middle Watch. "A-a-all the starboard watch! Seaboats, crews, and reliefs fall in!" Fore and aft the ship the mantle of responsibility changed wearers. Sentries, seamen, stokers, signalmen, their tale of bricks complete for a few hours, turned over to their reliefs and hurried to their hammocks.

On the bridge the two Lieutenants walked up and down for a few minutes, while the newcomer received details of the course and speed of the Fleet and the Captain's orders for the night. Then the Officer of the Watch that was ended unslung his binoculars and turned towards the ladder.

"I think that's all.... She's keeping station very well now, but they had a bit of trouble in the Engine-room earlier in the Watch. Captain wants to be called at daybreak. Good-night."

"Good-night."

The Midshipman of the Watch was already in position on the upper bridge, settling down to his four hours' vigil with a sextant on the lights of the next ship ahead. From the battery below came the voice of the Corporal of the Watch mus-

tering the hands. Overhead the wind thrummed in the shrouds and halliards: the steady throb of the engines beat out an accompaniment—a deep *pizzicato* accompaniment as if from some mighty bass-viol floating up through the open casings—and, somehow dominating all other sounds, the ceaseless swish and murmur of the waves breaking along the ship's side.

The Officer of the Watch crossed over to the Midshipman's side. "Are we in station all right?"

The boy lowered the sextant: "Yes, sir, quite steady."

"Right: give me the sextant and go and brew some cocoa in the chart-house. There's a spirit-lamp there."

The Midshipman vanished and reappeared a few minutes later with two cups of steaming beverage. They drank together, gulping it hastily to warm themselves.

"A-ah!" sighed the Lieutenant gratefully. "That's better. Now put the cups back, and come and show me Arcturus—if you have shaken off your fat head!"

* * * * *

A couple of hours passed. The Midshipman of the Watch, accompanied by the Corporal with a lantern, had gone his rounds of the mess-decks and cell-flat. The seaboat's crew had gone through an undress rehearsal of "Man overboard!" and were huddled yarning in the lee of the forecastle screen. Twice the ship had crept a shade out of her appointed station in the line, and, when the telegraph had rung the trouble to the Engine-room below, stolen back to her appointed bearing. Once the Fleet altered course majestically to avoid a fishing-fleet as it lay spread over the waters, a confusion of flares and bobbing lights.

The bridge was in darkness, save for the faint glow of the binnacle that threw into relief the rugged features of the Quartermaster at the wheel. The face might have been that of a bronze statue, but for a slight movement of the jaws as he thoughtfully chewed his quid. Suddenly a light at the masthead of the Flagship began to blink hurriedly. A signalman stepped out of the lee of the chart-house and rattled the key of the masthead flashing lamp. On all sides the other ships began blinking in answer to the Admiral's call. Presently the Yeoman spoke: a rocket soared up into the night ahead of them. The Lieutenant put his mouth to the voice-pipe and gave a clear spoken order, which the telegraph-man repeated: somewhere overhead a bell rang in answer from the engine-room.

The Fleet had increased speed.

The breeze freshened, and the men on the bridge ducked their heads as from time to time a shower of spray drifted over the weather-screens. The Midshipman of the Watch lowered his sextant and sniffed longingly, his nose in the air; the

off-shore wind had brought with it a hint of heather and moist earth. Then, with a little sigh, he steadied his sextant again on the lights of the next ahead.

* * * * *

The sky was turning pale in the East, and the chilly dawn crept over a grey sea. The faces of the men on the bridge slowly became distinguishable. They were the faces of the Morning Watch, wan in the growing light.

The Lieutenant rubbed the stubble on his chin and turned his glasses on a school of porpoises chasing each other through the waves. The sky astern changed gradually from grey to lilac. Low down on the horizon a little belt of cloud became slowly tinged with pink. Out of a hen-coop on the booms the shrill crow of a newly-awakened cockerel greeted another day. Then from the mess-deck, drifting up hatchway and ventilating cowl, came the hoarse bellow—

"'Eave out, 'eave out, 'eave out! Show a leg there, show a leg! 'Sun's a-scorching your eyes out!..."

The look-out in the foretop watched the antics of a small land-bird balancing itself on the forestay.

"Poor little bloke," he muttered, blowing on his benumbed fingers, "'spect's you wants yer breakfus'—same's me!"

XXI.

A ONE-GUN SALUTE.

"Every person subject to this Act who shall strike ... or lift up any weapon against his superior officer in the execution of his office, shall be punished with Death or such other punishment as is hereinafter mentioned."—Sec. 16, *Naval Discipline Act.*

In Official eyes—even in eyes anxious to condone—illicit rum and the unreasoning passion of a Celtic temperament were the sole causes of the trouble. Yet a man may fight Destiny in the shape of these evils and still make a very fair show of it. It was the addition of the third factor that in this case overtipped the scales.

Her red, untidy hair was usually screwed into wisps of last night's 'Football Herald.' She had green, provocative eyes that slanted upwards ever so slightly

at the corners, and coarse, chapped hands—useful hands, as many an overbold Ordinary Seaman had discovered to his fuddled amazement, but in no wise ornamental. Her speech was partly Lower-deck, partly Barrack-room, softened withal by the broad West Country burr; her home was an alehouse in an obscure back street near Devonport Dockyard.

She was in no sense of the word a ”nice” girl; but she was tall, deep-bosomed, and broad of hip, and appealed inordinately to Ivor Jenkins, Stoker 1st Class of His Majesty’s Navy, who was dark and undersized, and had lately developed a troublesome cough.

The recreations of a man who, on a daily rate of pay of 2s. 1d., contrives to support a bed-ridden mother and a consumptive sister, cannot perforce partake of the elaborate. Ivor, denied a wider choice, was therefore content to spend as much of his watch ashore as a jealously eked-out pint would allow, at the ”Crossed Killicks.” For many weeks past, alternate nights had found the little man perched on a three-legged stool in a corner of the bar, raging inwardly at an unnumbered host of rivals, dumbly grateful for such crumbs of recognition as Arabella, from behind the beer handles, was pleased to fling him.

The sailor-man a-wooing usually conducts his financial affairs with an open-handed generosity calculated to make a ministering angel pensive. In consequence, Ivor, who could not afford to back his protestations by invitations to the Hippodrome, whelk-suppers, and the like, dropped by degrees more and more out of the running. At first the girl gave him encouragement—not the vague, nebulous coquetry Mayfair recognises as such, but an intimate familiarity extended to slaps on the nose (boko), and once a dash of swipes down the back of his neck as Ivor stooped to recover a broken pipe. But nothing came of it—not even a penn’orth of fish-and-chips. Accustomed to tribute tendered with a lavish hand, Arabella decided that this must be a ”proper stinge,”—one, moreover, niggardly in his consumption of beer, and (since there was the good of the house to be considered) to be dealt a lesson in due season.

”Bella! ... Give us a kiss!”

Save for Ivor and the girl, the squalid bar was deserted. She paused in the act of replacing a bottle on the shelf behind her, and looked over her shoulder, half-surprised, half-contemptuous. A beam of afternoon sunlight slanted through the dusty panes and caught the greenish feline eyes and ruddy hair, innocent for once of curl-papers.

”Wot? ... Me—kiss—yu!” She spoke slowly, and flung each word like a whip-lash at the soul of Ivor Jenkins.

”Ah, yus, Bella—jest one. There ain’t——”

”Mai dear laife! Yu ain’t ’arf got no neck!” She turned with her hands on her hips and regarded him with a smile on her thin lips, measuring his undersized

stature with her eyes. ”I only kisses men—yu don’ even drink laike no man, yu don’. ’Sides, wot’ve ’ee done for us tu kiss ’ee? Us laikes men wot does things, yu know.”

Ivor winced, but never took his smouldering eyes from the girl. ”I’d do anything for you,” he said tensely, ”so I would,” and coughed abruptly.

She laughed and fell to wiping the sloppy counter. ”Them as wants mai kisses earns un. Same’s Pete Worley: broke out of uns ship, un did, tu take I tu theatre. An’ w’en th’ escort commed tu fetch un back, Pete un laid un out laike nine-pins! Proper man, un was!” She surveyed Ivor, perched smoking on his stool, and a sudden gleam came into her eyes.

”Yeer!—us knows of a kiss goin’ beggin’ tu-morrow afternoon.” She leaned across the counter with a dangerous tenderness in her rather hoarse voice, ”If so be as a man (she laid a slight intonation on the word) as’t leave tu go tu Dockyard Bank for’n hour, an’ slipped out, laike....”

It was his watch on board, as she knew; but she had also noted the red Good Conduct Badge on his arm, and chose it instead of the accustomed tribute he had denied her. Then her eyes hardened like agates. ”Simly yu ain’t got no money tu bank, though?”

”Aye,” said Ivor slowly; ”aye, indeed I have. Three poun’.” It was his sheet-anchor, saved (how Heaven and he alone knew) that his mother might eventually be buried with that circumstance which is dearer to the hearts of the Welsh than life itself.

The girl nodded, and laid her hand caressingly on his sleeve. ”Tha’s right, mai dear. Yu get leave tu go tu bank, an’ slip along ’ere. Tu-morrow afternoon ’bout five—will ’ee now?” She looked at him from beneath tawny lashes.

Ivor finished his beer and wiped his mouth musingly on the back of his hand. The girl thought he was considering the Good Conduct Badge: as a matter of fact Ivor was wondering how the Police at the Dockyard Gate might be circumvented.

”’Course,” she said indifferently, turning away, ”ef yu’m ’feered——”

The man flushed darkly and stood up. ”You’ll see,” he replied, and went out through the swing-doors in a gust of coughing. It had been worrying him a good deal lately, that cough.

II.

The short November afternoon was drawing to a close as Ivor left the Dockyard

Bank with a shining sovereign gripped tightly in his trousers pocket. Dusk was settling down on the lines of store-houses, and from the Hamoaze below came the hoot of syrens that told of a fog sweeping in from the Channel. Ivor strolled across the cobbles to where the figurehead of a bygone frigate lifted an impassive countenance, and from the shelter of its plinth he surveyed the gateway. The main entrance was closed, and the narrow door, that only admitted the passage of one person at a time, was guarded by a watchful policeman. It seemed as if nothing short of a miracle would get a man in uniform through without a pass.

Presently a bell in some neighbouring tower struck the hour, and the waiting man turned in the direction of the sound. The ships in the lower yard were invisible, only their top-masts appeared out of a fog that came slowly swirling in from the sea. Higher and higher it crept; then suddenly the policeman at the gate was blotted out, and the wall became a towering blackness that loomed up through the vapour. Still Ivor waited, holding his sovereign tightly, and wrestling with a cough that threatened every minute to betray him. Some parties of liberty-men going on leave tramped past: he heard the gates open and saw for a moment the glare of the streets beyond. A couple of officers in plain clothes appeared suddenly into the blurred circle of his vision and were swallowed again by the blackness. "What a fog!" he heard one say. The other laughed, and grumbled something about being glad he was not Channel groping. Their voices died away, and Ivor emerged to reconnoitre, only to scurry back into shelter as a telegraph boy on a bicycle steered a devious course past him across the cobbles. The little disc of light from his lamp zigzagged to and fro for a minute and was gone. Then Ivor heard the rumble of wheels and the clatter of a horse's hoofs: the lights of a four-wheeler passed him and stopped. The policeman was unbolting the gates.

It was Ivor's chance, and, realising it, he slipped up beside the cab. Inside was a figure muffled in a greatcoat, above which he caught a glimpse of a clean-shaven, impatient face. Presently the inmate lowered the further window and leant out, effectually interposing his body as a screen between Ivor and the guardian of the gate.

"Hurry up," he called; "I've got a train to catch."

The gates swung slowly back, the cab rumbled through, and with it passed Ivor Jenkins. Then for the first time he relinquished his grip on his sovereign, and permitted himself the luxury of a fit of unchecked coughing.

"Bilked 'im," he gasped when he got his breath again, half-awed at the ease with which he found himself in the strangely unfamiliar streets. At the corner of the side-street he turned and looked back at the grim wall. In the signal-tower that loomed above it into the murky sky the yeoman on watch had just tapped the key of the flashing lamp to test the circuit. To Ivor it seemed as if Fate had winked at him, solemnly and portentously.

* * * * *

Ivor pushed through the swing-doors of the ”Crossed Killicks” and looked hastily round the bar.

”’Ullo!....” he ejaculated blankly. ”W’ere’s Bella?”

The girl behind the counter, a short, stout woman in a purple plush bodice, tossed her head. ”’Er a’ternoon orf,” she explained tartly.

”Aye, but—w’ere’s she gorn?”

”Walkin’ out with a Blue Marine. ’Ippodrome, I think, they was goin’.”

Ivor sat down and fumbled blindly in the lining of his cap for his pipe. Save for a spot of colour on either cheek-bone, his face was an ugly grey.

”Fine upstanding feller, ’e was too,” added the barmaid, weighing Ivor in the balance of comparison, and finding him somewhat wanting. Ivor nodded dully, and for a while examined with apparently absorbed interest an advertisement on the wall opposite. Passion surged through him in waves that made the skin of his forehead tingle. So she’d bilked him after all: given him the go-by for a Blue Marine! Ivor knew him too, ... had once even stood him a drink.... The Adam’s-apple in his throat worked like a piston.

Presently the girl behind the bar looked up from her occupation of drying glasses and eyed him curiously; but all she saw was a small dark man, who sucked hard at an empty pipe, one fist clenched tightly in his trousers pocket, staring hard at an advertisement for somebody’s whisky.

At length, out of the chaos of his thoughts, two courses of action took shape and presented themselves for consideration. One was to bash the Blue Marine into irrecognition; the other was to get mercifully drunk as soon as possible. The Blue Marine, Ivor remembered, scaled a matter of fourteen stone, so he chose the latter alternative, and for thirty-six hours Oblivion, as understood by men of His Majesty’s Forces, received him into her arms.

III.

”Did remain absen’ over leave thirty-six tours, under haggravated circumstances,” declaimed the Master-at-Arms.

It was the first time Ivor had broken his leave for three years. His head ached intolerably: he felt sick, too, and heard as from an infinite distance the cool, crisp tones of the Commander, who spoke sternly of the penalties attached to ”not playing the game.” Ivor listened sullenly. It was another and an older game

he had tried to play,—a game in which Fate seemed to hold most of the trumps. There was a good deal more in the same strain about the abuse of privileges, and it all ended in his being placed in the Captain's Report, to stand over till next day.

At dinner his resentment against the Universe in general swelled into an excited flood of lower-deck jargon. In particular, he poured out invective on the perfidy of Woman, and 43 Mess, with the peculiar understanding vouched in the matter to men who go down to the sea in ships, sucked its teeth in sympathetic encouragement.

"I'd serve 'er to rights," said a youthful Second-Class Stoker darkly. He removed the point of his clasp-knife from his mouth, whither it had conveyed a potato, and illustrated with a gesture an argument certain of his feminine acquaintances in the Mile End Road were supposed to have found conclusive.

"Don't you take on, Taff," said another, pushing over his pannikin of rum. "'Ave a rub at this lot." Ivor finished his sympathiser's tot, and several others that were furtively offered him—for he was a popular little man among his messmates. But spirit—even "three-water" rum—is not the soundest remedy for an alcoholic head. It set him coughing, and deepened the sense of injury that rankled within him.

"Wot you wants," said a Leading Stoker, "is to run about an' bite things, like. You go on deck an' 'ave a smoke." He knew the danger-signals of a mess-deck with the intimacy of seventeen years' experience, and Ivor went sullenly. But it was a dangerous man that stopped at the break of the forecastle to light his pipe.

"Well," he said presently, "what d'you reckon I'll get whateffer?" His "Raggie" considered the situation. "Couldn't rightly say; there's the Jauntie[#] over by the 'atchway—go 'long an' ask 'im." Ivor smoked in silence for a moment, then nodded, and stepping through the wreaths of tobacco smoke, touched the Master-at-Arms on the shoulder. The latter, who was listening to a story related by the Ship's Steward, was a small man, with a grim vinegary face. He turned sharply—

[#] Master-at-Arms.

"Well?" he said curtly.

Now Ivor had stepped across the deck, honestly intending to ask the probable extent of the punishment the Captain would award him for breaking his leave. The suddenness with which the Master-at-Arms turned jarred his jangled nerves; the sour face opposite him was the face of the man who, on the Lower Deck, represented Law, Order, and Justice, things Ivor knew to be perverse and monstrous mockeries. His brain swam with the fumes of the thirty-six hours' debauch, reawakened by his messmate's rum. A sudden insane rage closed down on him like a mist, leaving him conscious only of the Master-at-Arms' face, as

in the centre of a partly fogged negative, very distinct, and for an instant imperturbable and maddening.... Yet, as Ivor struck, fair and true between the eyes, he somehow realised that not even now had he got level with Fate.

IV.

A man seated in the foremost cell raised an unshaven face from his hands as the sullen report of a gun reached him through the open scuttle. For a while he speculated dully what it was for; then with curious disinterestedness remembered that it was the court-martial gun, and that he, Ivor Jenkins, was that day to be tried for an offence the extreme penalty for which is Death.

They said he'd slogged the Jauntie. For a while he had been, dazed and incredulous, but as the testimony of innumerable witnesses seemed to leave no doubt about the matter, Ivor accepted the intelligence with stoical unconcern. Personally he had no recollection of anything save a great uproar and a sea of excited faces appearing suddenly on all sides out of a red mist.... However, there were the witnesses, and, moreover, there was still an unexplained tenderness about his knuckles.

"I pleads guilty," was all the prisoner's friend (a puzzled and genuinely sympathetic Engineer Lieutenant) could get out of him.

"Well, I should have thought you were the last man to have done such a thing in the whole of the ship's company."

"Same 'ere, sir," said Ivor, and fell a-coughing.

Subsequent proceedings bewildered and finally bored him. They thrust documents upon him, wherein he found his name coupled to the incomprehensible prefix "For that he," and his misdemeanour described in a style worthy of the 'Police Budget.' The Chaplain visited him and spoke words of reproof in a kindly and mechanical tone. For the rest, he was left to himself throughout the long days; to cough and cough again, to watch the light grow and fade, to count the stars in the barred circle of the scuttle, and to the recollection of green, slanting eyes vexed by dusty sunlight in their depths....

* * * * *

"Have you any objection to any members of this Court?"

Ivor started at the question and looked round the cabin. Till then he had not noticed his surroundings much. A Captain and several Commanders in frock-coats and epaulettes were seated round a baize-covered table; they were enclosed

by a rope covered with green cloth, secured breast-high to wooden pillars, also covered with green cloth. It was the Captain's fore-cabin, and the bulkheads were covered with paintings of ships. One of these in particular—a corvette close-hauled—arrested Ivor's attention. The Deputy Judge-Advocate, a Paymaster with a preternaturally grave face and slightly nervous manner, repeated his question.

"Do you object to being tried by any of the Officers present on the Court?" Ivor moistened his lips; why on earth should they expect him to object to them? An unknown Master-at-Arms standing beside him with a drawn sword nudged him in the ribs.

"No, sir."

The Captains and Commanders then rose with a clank of swords, and swore to administer justice without partiality, favour, or affection, in tones that for a moment brought Ivor visions of a stuffy chapel (Ebenezer, they called it) in far away Glamorganshire. Then the Judge-Advocate turned to him again.

"You need not plead either 'Guilty' or 'Not Guilty.' But if you wish to plead 'Guilty' you may do so now."

At last: "Guilty," said Ivor Jenkins.

For an instant there was utter silence. The junior Commander stirred slightly and glanced at the clock: he would have time for that round of golf after all.

The Prisoner's Friend then gave evidence, and Ivor experienced his first sensation of interest at hearing himself described as an excellent working hand, who had never given anything but satisfaction to his superiors. A perspiring and obviously embarrassed Chief Stoker followed.

"The last man in the ship I'd 'a' thought 'ud do such a thing," he maintained. Ivor glanced at him indulgently, as one who hears an oft-repeated platitude, and resumed his study of the corvette close-hauled.

"Clear the Court," said the President briskly. Ivor found himself once more in the lobby, sitting between his escort. One, a kindly man, pressed a small, hard object into his hand. Ivor nodded imperceptible thanks, and under cover of a cough, conveyed it to his mouth. It was a plug of Navy tobacco.

A bell rang overhead, and the prisoner was marched back into Court.

"... to be imprisoned with hard labour for the term of twelve calendar months." It was over.

* * * * *

"Now say 'Ah!' ... Again! ... Raise your arms ... H'm." The Surgeon disentangled himself from his stethoscope and looked Ivor in the eyes.

"My lad," he said bluntly, "it's Hospital for you—and too late at that."

In the Wardroom later on he met the Engineer Lieutenant. ”I’d make a better Prisoner’s Friend than ever you will,” he remarked. Pressed for an explanation, he tapped the stethoscope-case in his pocket.

”Consumption—galloping,” he said.

Perhaps Ivor had held the Ace of Trumps after all.

XXII.

CONCERNING THE SAILOR-MAN.

”Able Seaman, Seaman Gunner, one Good Conduct Badge.” Thus, with a click of unaccustomed boot-heels, he might describe himself at the monthly ”Muster by open-list.” In less formal surroundings, however, he is wont to refer to himself as a ”matlow,” a designation not infrequently accompanied by fervid embellishments.

Occasionally he serves to adorn the moral of a temperance tract: a reporter, hard pressed for police court news, may record one of his momentary lapses from the paths of convention ashore. Otherwise Literature knows him not.

Generally speaking, his appearance is familiar enough, though it is to be feared that the world—the unfamiliar world of streets and a shod people, of garish ”pubs” and pitfalls innumerable—does not invariably see him at his best. The influence of the Naval Discipline Act relaxes ashore, and not unnatural reaction inspires him with a desire to tilt his cap on the back of his head and a fine indiscrimination in the matter of liquid refreshment.

But to be appreciated he must be seen in his proper sphere. On board ship he is not required to play up to any romantic *rôle*: no one regards him with curiosity or even interest, and he is in consequence normal. Ashore, aware of observation, he becomes as unnatural as a self-conscious child. A very genuine pride in his appearance is partly the outcome of tradition and partly fostered by a jealous supervision of his Divisional Lieutenant. A score of subtleties go to make up his rig, and never was tide bound by more unswerving laws than those that set a span to the width of his bell-bottomed trousers or the depth of his collar. This collar was instituted by his forebears to protect their jackets from the grease on their queues. The queue has passed away, but the collar remains, and its width is 16 inches, no more, no less. The triple row of tape that adorns its edge commemorates (so runs the legend) the three victories that won for him his heritage; in perpetual mourning for the hero of Trafalgar, the tar of to-day knots

a black silk handkerchief beneath it. It is doubtful whether he is aware of the portent of these emblems, for he is not commonly of an inquiring turn of mind, but they are as they were in the beginning, they must be "just so," and that for him suffices.

A number of factors go to make his speech the obscure jargon it has been represented. Recruited from the North, South, East, and West, he brings with him the dialect he spoke in childhood. And it were easier to change the colour of a man's eyes than to take out of his mouth the brogue he lisped in his cradle. A succession of commissions abroad enriches his vocabulary with a smattering of half the tongues of Earth—Arabic, Chinese, Malay, Hindustanee, and Japanese: smatterings truly, and rightly untranslatable, but Pentecostal in their variety. Lastly, and proclaiming his vocation most surely of all, are the undying sea phrases and terms without which no sailor can express himself. Even the objects of everyday life need translation. The floor becomes a deck, stairs a hatchway, the window a scuttle or gun-port. There are others, smacking of masts and yards, and the "Tar-and-Spunyarn" of a bygone Navy; they are obsolete to-day, yet current speech among men who at heart remain unchanged, in spite of Higher Education and the introduction of marmalade and pickles into their scale of rations. The tendency to emphasis that all vigorous forms of life demand, finds outlet in the meaningless oaths that mar the sailor's speech. Lack of culture denies him a wider choice of adjectives: the absence of privacy or refinements in his mode of life, and a great familiarity from earliest youth, would seem an explanation of, if not an excuse for, a habit which remains irradicable in spite of well-meaning efforts to counteract it.

The conditions of Naval Service sever his home ties very soon in life. The isolation from feminine and gentler influences that it demands is responsible for the curiously intimate friendships and loyalty that exist on the mess-deck of a man-of-war. With a friend the blue-jacket is willing to share all his worldly possessions—even to the contents of the mysterious little bag that holds his cleaning-rags, brick, and emery paper. Since the work of polishing a piece of brass make no great demand on his mental activity, the sailor chooses this time to "spin a yarn," and, from the fact that the recipient of these low-voiced quaintly-worded confidences usually shares his cleaning-rags, the tar describes his friend as his "Raggie." To the uninitiated the word signifies little, but to the sailor it represents all in his hard life that "suffereth long and is kind." His love for animals, which is proverbial, affords but another outlet for the springs of affection that exist in all hearts, and, in his case, being barred wider scope, are intensified.

Outside events have for him but little interest. So long as he is not called upon to bear a hand by his divinely appointed superior, while his ration of rum and stand-easy time are not interfered with, the rise and fall of dynasties, battle,

murder, and sudden death, leave him imperturbable and unmoved. Only when these are accompanied by sufficiently gruesome pictorial representations in the section of the press he patronises can they be said to be of much import to him. But he dearly loves a funeral.

His attitude towards his officers is commonly that demanded by an austere discipline, and accompanied more often than not by real affection and loyalty. He accepts punishment at the hands of his Superior in the spirit that he accepts rain or toothache. Its justice may be beyond his reasoning, but administered by the Power that rules his paths, it is the Law, as irrevocable as Fate.

Morally he has been portrayed in two lights. Idealists claim for him a guilelessness of soul that would insult an Arcadian shepherd. To his detractors he is merely a godless scoffer, rudely antagonistic to Religion, a brand not even worth snatching from the burning. Somewhere midway between these two extremes is to be found the man as he really is, to whom Religion presents itself (when he considers the matter at all) a form of celestial Naval Discipline tempered by sentimentality.

But these are generalities, and may not apply to even a fraction of the men in the Fleet to-day. Conditions of life and modes of thought on the Lower Deck are even now changing as the desert sand, and those who live among sailor-men would hesitate the most to unite their traits in one comprehensive summary. It is only by glimpses here and there of individuals who represent types that one may glean knowledge of the whole.

In the Ship's Office of a man-of-war are rows of neat brass-bound boxes, and here are stowed the certificates of the Ship's Company, those of each Class—seamen, engine-room ratings, marines, &c., being kept separately. At the first sight there is little enough about these prosaic documents to suggest romance or even human interest to the ordinary individual. Yet if you read between the lines a little, picking out an entry here and there among the hundreds of different handwritings, you can weave with the aid of a little imagination all manner of whimsical fancies. And if, at the end, the study of them leaves you little wiser, it will be with a quickened interest in the inner life of the barefooted, incomprehensible being on whose shoulders will some day perchance fall the burden of your destiny and mine.

The King's Regulations and Admiralty Instructions, with a flourish of unwonted metaphor, refer to the document as "a man's passport through life." The sailor himself, ever prone to generalities, describes his Certificate as his "Discharge." In Accountant circles in which the thing circulates it is known as a "Parchment."

A Service Certificate—to give its official title—is a double sheet of parchment with printed headings, foolscap size, which is prepared for every man on

first entry into the Service. At the outset it is inscribed with his name, previous occupation and description, his religion, the name and address of his next of kin, and the period of service for which he engages.

In due course, when he completes his training and is drafted to sea, his Certificate accompanies him. As he goes from ship to ship, on pages 2 and 3 are entered the records of his service, his rating, the names of his ships, and the period he served in each.

On 31st December in each year his Captain assesses in his own handwriting, on page 4, the character and ability of each man in the ship. These fluctuate between various stages from "Very Good" to "Indifferent" in the former case; "Exceptional" to "Inferior" in the latter. Here, too, appear the history of award and deprivation of Good Conduct Badges; the more severe penalties of wrong-doing, such as cells and imprisonment. Here, too, they must remain (for parchment cannot be tampered with, and an alteration must be sanctioned by the Admiralty) in perpetual appraisement or reproach until the man completes his Engagement and his Certificate becomes his own property.

The heading PREVIOUS OCCUPATION shows plainly enough the trades and classes from which the Navy is recruited, and is interesting, if only for the incongruity of the entries. They are most varied among the Stokers' Certificates, as these men entered the Service later in life than the Seamen.

Labourer suggests little save perhaps a vision of the Thames Embankment at night, and the evidence that some one at least found a solution of the Unemployment problem. But we may be wronging him. Doubtless he had employment enough. Yet I still connect him with the Embankment. At the bidding of the L.C.C. it was here he wielded pick and crowbar until the sudden distant hoot of a syren stirred something dormant within him: the barges sliding down-stream out of a smoky sunset into the Unknown suggested a wider world. So he laid down his tools, and his pay is now 2s. 1d. per diem: from his NEXT OF KIN notation he apparently supports a wife on it.

Farm Hand. Can you say what led him from kine-scented surroundings and the swishing milk-pails to the stokehold of a man-of-war? Did the clatter of the threshing-machine wake an echo of

> "... the bucket and clang of the brasses
> Working together by perfect degree"?

Perhaps it was the ruddy glow of the hop-ovens by night that he exchanged for the hell-glare of a battleship's furnaces. Or, as a final solution, was it the later product of these same ovens, in liquid form, that helped the Recruiting Officer?

Newspaper Vendor. A pretty conceit, that Vendor! He has changed vastly since he dodged about the Strand, hawking the world's news and exchanging shrill obscenities with the rebuke of policemen and cab-drivers. But the gutter-patois clings to him yet: and of nights you may see him forward, seated on an upturned bucket, wringing discords of unutterable melancholy from a mouth-organ.

Merchant Seaman—Golf Caddie. He spat in the sand-box before making your tee, and looked the other way when you miss your drive, if he was as loyal as caddie as he is a sailor. *Errand Boy—Circus Artiste.* Of a surety he was the clown, this last. His inability to forget his early training has on more than one occasion introduced him to a cell and the bitter waters of affliction. But he is much in demand at sing-songs and during stand-easy time.

Now here is one with a heavy black line ruled across his record on page 2, and in the margin appears the single letter "K" He is a recovered deserter. He "ran," after eight years' service and stainless record. Was it some red-lipped, tousle-haired siren who lured him from the paths of rectitude? Did the galling monotony and austere discipline suddenly prove too much for him? Was it a meeting with a Yankee tar in some foreign grog-shop that tempted him with tales of a higher pay and greater independence? Hardly the latter, I think, because they caught him, and on page 4 of the tell-tale parchment appears the penalty—90 days' Detention.

Lastly: *Porter.* Where on earth did he shoulder trunks and bawl "By y'r leave"? Was it amid the echoing vastness of a London terminus, with its smoke and gloom? Or—and this I think the more probable—was it on some sleepy branch-line that he rang a bell or waved a flag, collected tickets, and clattered to and fro with fine effect in enormous hobnail boots? Then one fine day ... but imagination falters here, leaving us no nearer the reason why he exchanged his green corduroys for the jumper and collar. And if we asked him (which we cannot very well), I doubt if he could tell himself.

They make a motley collection, these tinkers and tailors and candlestick-makers, but in time they filter through the same mould, and emerge, as a rule, vastly improved. You may sometimes encounter them, in railway stations or tram-cars, returning on leave to visit a home that has become no more than an amiable memory.

And some day, maybe, you will advertise for a caretaker, or one to do odd jobs about the house and garden, whose wife can do plain cooking. Look out then for the man with tattooed wrists, and eyes that meet yours unflinching from a weather-beaten face. He will come to apply in person for the job—being no great scribe or believer in the power of the pen. He will arrange his visit so as to arrive towards evening,—this being, he concludes, your "stand-easy time." He wastes

few words, but from the breast-pocket of an obviously ready-made jacket he will produce a creased and soiled sheet of parchment.

It is the record of his life: and after two-and-twenty years through which the frayed passport has brought him, at forty years of age, he turns to you for employment and a life wherein (it is his one stipulation) "there shall be no more sea."

XXIII.

THE GREATER LOVE.

The sun was setting behind a lurid bank of cloud above the hills of Spain, and, as is usual at Gibraltar about that hour, a light breeze sprang up. It eddied round the Rock and scurried across the harbour, leaving dark cat's-paws in its trail: finally it reached the inner mole, alongside which a cruiser was lying.

A long pendant of white bunting, that all day had hung listlessly from the main top-mast, stirred, wavered, and finally bellied out astern, the gilded bladder at the tail bobbing uneasily over the surface of the water.

The Officer of the Watch leaned over the rail and watched the antics of the bladder, round which a flock of querulous gulls circled and screeched. "The paying-off pendant[#] looks as if it were impatient," he said laughingly to an Engineer Lieutenant standing at his side.

[#] A pendant, one-and-a-quarter times the length of the ship, flown by ships homeward bound under orders to pay off.

The other smiled in his slow way and turned seaward, nodding across the bay towards Algeciras. "Not much longer to wait—there's the steamer with the mail coming across now." He took a couple of steps across the deck and turned. "Only another 1200 miles. Isn't it ripping to think of, after three years...?" He rubbed his hands with boyish satisfaction. "All the coal in and stowed—boats turned in, funnels smoking—that's what I like to see! Only the mail to wait for now: and the gauges down below"—he waggled his forefinger in the air, laughing,—"like that...!"

The Lieutenant nodded and hitched his glass under his arm. ”Your middle watch, Shortie? Mine too: we start working up for our passage trial then, don’t we? Whack her up, lad—for England, Home, and Beauty!”

The Engineer Lieutenant walked towards the hatchway. ”What do you think!” and went below humming—

”From Ushant to Scilly...

The Lieutenant on watch turned and looked up at the Rock, towering over the harbour. Above the green-shuttered, pink and yellow houses, and dusty, sun-dried vegetation, the grim pile was flushing rose-colour against the pure sky. How familiar it was, he thought, this great milestone on the road to the East, and mused awhile, wondering how many dawns he had lain under its shadow: how many more sunsets he would watch and marvel at across the purple Bay.

”British as Brixton!” He had read the phrase in a book once, describing Gibraltar. So it was, when you were homeward bound. He resumed his measured pacing to and fro. The ferry steamer had finished her short voyage and had gone alongside the wharf, out of sight behind an arm of the mole. Not much longer to wait now. He glanced at his wrist-watch. ”Postie” wouldn’t waste much time getting back. Not all the beer in Waterport Street nor all the glamour of the ”Ramps” would lure him astray to-night. The Lieutenant paused in his measured stride and beckoned a side-boy. ”Tell the signalman to let me know directly the postman is sighted coming along the mole.”

He resumed his leisurely promenade, wondering how many letters there would be for him, and who would write. His mother, of course, ... and Ted at Charterhouse. His speculations roamed afield. Any one else? Then he suddenly remembered the Engineer Lieutenant imitating the twitching gauge-needle with his forefinger. Lucky beggar he was. There was some one waiting for him who mattered more than all the Teds in the world. More even than a Mother—at least, he supposed.... His thoughts became abruptly sentimental and tender.

A signalman, coming helter-skelter down the ladder, interrupted them, as the Commander stepped out of his cabin on to the quarter-deck.

”Postman comin’ with the mail, sir.”

A few minutes later a hoist of flags, whirled hurriedly to the masthead, asking permission to proceed ”in execution of previous orders.” What those orders were, even the paying-off pendant knew, trailing aft over the stern-walk in the light wind.

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The Rock lay far astern like a tinted shadow, an opal set in a blue-grey sea. Once beyond the Straits the wind freshened, and the cruiser began to lift her lean bows to the swell, flinging the spray aft along the forecastle in silver rain. The Marine bugler steered an unsteady course to the quarterdeck hatchway and sounded the Officers' Dinner Call.

> "Officers' wives eat puddings and pies,
> But sailors' wives eat skilly..."

chanted the Lieutenant of the impending first watch, swaying to the roll of the ship as he adjusted his tie before the mirror. He thumped the bulkhead between his cabin and the adjoining one.

"Buck up, Shortie!" he shouted; "it's Saturday Night at Sea! Your night for a glass of port."

"Sweethearts and wives!" called another voice across the flat. "You'll get drunk to-night, Snatcher, if you try to drink to all——" the voice died away and rose again in expostulation with a Marine servant. "... Well, does it *look* like a clean shirt...!"

"Give it a shake, Pay, and put it on like a man!" Some one else had joined in from across the flat. The Engineer Lieutenant pushed his head inside his neighbour's cabin: "Come along—come along! You'll be late for dinner. Fresh grub to-night: no more 'Russian Kromeskis' and 'Fanny Adams'!"

"One second.... Right!" They linked arms and entered the Wardroom as the President tapped the table for grace. The Surgeon scanned the menu with interest. "Jasus! Phwat diet!" he ejaculated, quoting from an old Service story. "Listen!" and read out—

"Soup: Clear."

"That's boiled swabs," interposed the Junior Watch-keeper.

"Mr President, sir, I object—this Officer's unladylike conversation."

"Round of port—fine him!" interrupted several laughing voices.

"Go on, Doc.; what next?"

"Fish: 'Mullets.'"

"Main drain loungers," from the Junior Watch-keeper. "Isn't he a little Lord Fauntleroy—two rounds of port!"

"*Entree*: Russian Kromeskis——" A roar of protest.

"And——?"

"Mutton cutlets."

"Goat, he means. What an orgie! Go on; fain would we hear the worst, fair chirurgeon," blathered the Paymaster. "Joint?"

"Joint; mutton or——"

”Princely munificence,” murmured the First Lieutenant. ”He’s not a messman: he’s a—a—what’s the word?”

”Philanthropist. What’s the awful alternative?”

”There isn’t any; it’s scratched out.” The A.P. and the Junior Watch-keeper clung to each other. ”The originality of the creature! And the duff?”

”Rice-pudding.”

”Ah me! alack-a-day! alas!” The Paymaster tore his hair. ”I must prophesy ... *must* prophesy,—shut up, every one! Shut up!” He closed his eyes and pawed the air feebly. ”I’m a medium. I’m going to prophesy. I feel it coming.... The savoury is ... the savoury is”—there was a moment’s tense silence—”sardines on toast.” He opened his eyes. ”Am I right, sir? Thank you.”

The Surgeon leaned forward, and picking up the massive silver shooting trophy that occupied the centre of the table, handed it to a waiter.

”Take that to the Paymaster, please. First prize for divination and second sight. And you, Snatcher—you’ll go down for another round of port if you keep on laughing with your mouth full.”

So the meal progressed. The ”mullets” were disentangled from their paper jackets amid a rustling silence of interrogation. The Worcester sauce aided and abetted the disappearance of the Russian Kromeskis, as it had so often done before. The mutton was voted the limit, and the rice-pudding held evidences that the cook’s hair wanted cutting. The Junior Watch-keeper—proud officer of that functionary’s division—vowed he’d have it cut in a manner which calls for no description in these pages. There weren’t any sardines on toast. The Philanthropist appeared in person, with dusky, upturned palms, to deplore the omission.

”Ow! signor—olla fineesh! I maka mistake! No have got sardines, signor...!”

”Dear old Ah Ying!” sighed the Engineer Lieutenant, ”I never really loved him till this minute. Why did we leave him at Hong-Kong and embark this snake-in-the-grass.... No sardines...!”

But for all that every one seemed to have made an admirable meal, and the Chaplain’s ”For what we have received, thank God!” brought it to a close. The table was cleared, the wine decanters passed round, and once again the President tapped with his ivory mallet. There was a little silence—

”Mr Vice—the King!”

The First Lieutenant raised his glass. ”Gentlemen—the King!”

”The King!” murmured the Mess, with faces grown suddenly decorous and grave. At that moment the Corporal of the Watch entered; he glanced down the table, and approaching the Junior Watch-keeper’s chair saluted and said something in an undertone. The Junior Watch-keeper nodded, finished his port, and rose, folding his napkin. His neighbour, the Engineer Lieutenant, leaned back in his chair, speaking over his shoulder—

”Your First Watch, James?”

The other nodded.

”Then,” with mock solemnity, ”may I remind you that our lives are in your hands till twelve o’clock? Don’t forget that, will you?”

The Junior Watch-keeper laughed. ”I’ll bear it in mind.” At the doorway he turned with a smile: ”It won’t be the first time your valuable life has been there.”

”Or the last, we’ll hope.”

”We’ll hope not, Shortie.”

The buzz of talk and chaff had again begun to ebb and flow round the long table. The First Lieutenant lit a cigarette and began collecting napkin-rings, placing them eventually in a row, after the manner of horses at the starting-post. ”Seven to one on the field, bar one—Chief, your ring’s disqualified. It would go through the ship’s side. Now, wait for the next roll—stand by! Clear that flower-pot——”

”Disqualified be blowed! Why, I turned it myself when I was a student, out of a bit of brass I stole——”

”Can’t help that; it weighs a ton—scratched at the post!”

The Commander tapped the table with his little hammer—

”May I remind you all that it’s Saturday Night at Sea?” and gave the decanters a little push towards his left-hand neighbour. The First Lieutenant brushed the starters into a heap at his side; the faintest shadow passed across his brow.

”So it is!” echoed several voices.

”Now, Shortie, fill up! Snatcher, you’d better have a bucket.... ’There’s a Burmah girl a-settin’ an’ I know she thinks,’—port, Number One?” The First Lieutenant signed an imperceptible negation and pushed the decanter round, murmuring something about hereditary gout.

It was ten years since he had drunk that toast: since a certain tragic dawn, stealing into the bedroom of a Southsea lodging, found him on his knees at a bedside.... They all knew the story, as men in Naval Messes afloat generally do know each other’s tragedies and joys. And yet his right-hand neighbour invariably murmured the same formula as he passed the wine on Saturday nights at sea. In its way it was considered a rather subtle intimation that no one wanted to pry into his sorrow—even to the extent of presuming that he would never drink that health again.

In the same way they all knew that it was the one occasion on which the little Engineer Lieutenant permitted himself the extravagance of wine. He was saving up to get married; and perhaps for the reason that he had never mentioned the fact, every one not only knew it, but loved and chaffed him for it.

The decanters travelled round, and the First Lieutenant leaned across to

the Engineer Lieutenant, who was contemplatively watching the smoke of his cigarette. There was a whimsical smile in the grave, level eyes.

”I suppose we shall have to think about rigging a garland[#] before long, eh?”

[#] A garland of evergreens is triced up to the triatic stay between the masts on the occasion of an officer’s marriage.

The other laughed half-shyly. ”Yes, before long, I hope, Number One.”

Down came the ivory hammer—

”Gentlemen—Sweethearts and Wives!”

”And may they never meet!” added the Engineer Commander. In reality the most domesticated and blameless of husbands, it was the ambition of his life to be esteemed a sad dog, and that, men should shake their heads over him crying ”Fie!”

The First Lieutenant gathered together his silver rings. ”Now then, clear the table. She’s rolling like a good ’un. Seven to one on the field, bar——”

”Speech!” broke in the Paymaster. ”Speech, Shortie! Few words by a young officer about to embark on the troubled sea of matrimony. Hints on the Home——”

The prospective bridegroom shook his head, laughing, and coloured in a way rather pleasant to see. He rose, pushing in his chair. In the inside pocket of his mess-jacket was an unopened letter, saved up-to read over a pipe in peace,

”My advice to you all is——”

”’Don’t,’” from the Engineer Commander.

”Mind your own business,” and the Engineer Lieutenant fled from the Mess amid derisive shouts of ”Coward!” The voice of the First Lieutenant rose above the hubbub—

”Seven to one on the field—and what about a jump or two? Chuck up the menu-card, Pay. Now, boys, roll, bowl, or pitch ... ’Every time a blood-orange or a good see-gar’...!”

* * * * *

The Officer of the First Watch leaned out over the bridge rails, peering into the darkness that enveloped the forecastle, and listening intently. The breeze had freshened, and the cruiser slammed her way into a rising sea, labouring with the peculiar motion known as a ”cork-screw roll”: the night was very dark. Presently

he turned and walked to the chart-house door: inside, the Navigation Officer was leaning over the chart, wrinkling his brows as he pencilled a faint line.

"Pilot," said the other, "just step out here a second."

The Navigator looked up, pushing his cap from his forehead. "What's up?"

"I think the starboard anchor is 'talking.' I wish you'd come and listen a moment." The Navigator stepped out on to the bridge, closing the chart-house door after him, and paused a moment to accustom his eyes to the darkness. "Dark night, isn't it? Wind's getting up, too...." He walked to the end of the bridge and leaned out. The ship plunged into a hollow with a little shudder and then flung her bows upwards into, a cascade of spray. A dull metallic sound detached itself from the sibilant rushing of water and the beat of waves against the ship's side, repeating faintly with each roll of the ship from the neighbourhood of the anchor-bed. The Navigator nodded: "Yes, ... one of the securing chains wants tautening, I should say. 'Saltash Luck'[#] for some one!" He moved back into the chart-house and picked up the parallel-rulers again.

[#] A thorough wetting.

The Lieutenant of the Watch went to the head of the ladder and called the Boatswain's Mate, who was standing in the lee of the conning-tower yarning with the Corporal of the Watch—

"Pipe the duty sub. of the watch to fall in with oilskins on; when they're present, take them on to the forecastle and set up the securing chain of the starboard bower-anchor. Something's worked loose. See that any one who goes outside the rail has a bowline on."

"Aye, aye, sir." The Boatswain's Mate descended the ladder, giving a few preliminary "cheeps" with his pipe before delivering himself of his tidings of "Saltash Luck" to the duty sub. of the port watch.

The Officer of the Watch gave an order to the telegraph-man on the bridge, and far below in the Engine-room they heard the clang of the telegraph gongs. He turned into the chart-house and opened the ship's log, glancing at the clock as he did so. Then he wrote with a stumpy bit of pencil—

"9.18. Decreased speed to 6 knots. Duty Sub. secured starboard bower-anchor."

He returned to the bridge and leaned over the rail, straining his eyes into the darkness and driving spray towards the indistinct group of men working on the streaming forecastle. In the light of a swaying lantern he could make out a figure getting out on to the anchor-bed; another was turning up with a rope's

end; he heard the faint click of a hammer on metal. The ship lurched and plunged abruptly into the trough of a sea. An oath, clear-cut and distinct, tossed aft on the wind, and a quick shout.

He turned aft and rushed to the top of the ladder, bawling down between curved palms with all the strength of his lungs.

* * * * *

The Engineer Lieutenant who left the Wardroom after dinner did not immediately go on deck. He went first to his cabin, where he filled and lit a pipe, and changed his mess-jacket for a comfortable, loose-fitting monkey-jacket. Then he settled down in his armchair, wedged his feet against the bunk to steady himself against the roll of the ship, and read his letter. Often as he read he smiled, and once he blinked a little, misty-eyed. The last sheet he re-read several times.

"... Oh, isn't it good to think of! It was almost worth the pain of separation to have this happiness now—to know that every minute is bringing you nearer. I wake up in the morning with that happy sort of feeling that something nice is going to happen soon—and then I realise: you are coming Home! I jump out of bed and tear another leaf off the calendar,—there are only nine left now, and then comes one marked with a big cross.... Do you know the kind of happiness that hurts? Or is it only a girl who can feel it? ... I pray every night that the days may pass quickly, and that you may come safely."

It was a very ordinary little love-letter, with its shy admixture of love and faith and piety: the sort so few men ever earn, and so many (in Heaven's mercy) are suffered to receive. The recipient folded it carefully, replaced it in its envelope, and put it in his pocket. Then he lifted his head suddenly, listening....

Down below, the Engine-room telegraph gong had clanged, and the steady beat of the engines slowed. With an eye on his wrist-watch he counted the muffled strokes of the piston.... Decreased to 6 knots. What was the matter? Fog? He rose and leaned over his bunk, peering through the scuttle. Quite clear. He decided to light a pipe and go on deck for a "breather" before turning in, and glanced at the little clock ticking on the bulkhead. Twenty past nine; ten minutes walk on the quarter-deck and then to bed. It was his middle watch.

As he left his cabin some one in the Wardroom began softly playing the piano, and the Paymaster's clear baritone joined in, singing a song about somebody's grey eyes watching for somebody else. The Mess was soaking in sentiment to-night: must be the effect of Saturday Night at Sea he reflected.

He reached the quarter-deck and stood looking round, swaying easily with the motion of the ship. The sea was getting up, and the wind blew a stream of tiny sparks from his pipe. Farther aft the sentry on the life-buoys was mechanically

walking his beat, now toiling laboriously up a steep incline, now trying to check a too precipitous descent. The Engineer Lieutenant watched him for a moment, listening to the notes of the piano tinkling up through the open skylight from the Wardroom.

> ”I know of two white arms
> Waiting for me ...”

The singer had started another verse; the Engineer Lieutenant smiled faintly, and walked to the ship’s side to stare out into the darkness. Why on earth had they slowed down? A sudden impatience filled him. Every minute was precious now. Why——

”MAN OVERBOARD. AWAY LIFEBOAT’S CREW!” Not for nothing had the Officer of the Watch received a ”Masts and Yards” upbringing; the wind forward caught the stentorian shout and hurled it along the booms and battery, aft to the quarter-deck where the little Engineer Lieutenant was standing, one hand closed over the glowing bowl of his pipe, the other thrust into his trousers pocket.

The Engine-room telegraph began clanging furiously, the sound passing up the casings and ventilators into the night; then the Boatswain’s Mate sent his ear-piercing pipe along the decks, calling away the lifeboat’s crew. The sentry on the life-buoys wrenched at the releasing knob of one of his charges and ran across to the other.

The leaden seconds passed, and the Engineer Lieutenant still stood beside the rail, mechanically knocking the ashes from his pipe.... Then something went past on the crest of a wave: something white that might have been a man’s face, or broken water showing up in the glare of a scuttle.... A sound out of the darkness that might have been the cry of a low-flying gull.

Now it may be argued that the Engineer Lieutenant ought to have stayed where he was. Going overboard on such a night was too risky for a man whose one idea was to get home as quickly as possible—who, a moment before, had chafed at the delay of reduced speed. Furthermore, he had in his pocket a letter bidding him come home safely; and for three years he had denied himself his little luxuries for love of her who wrote it....

All the same—would she have him stand and wonder if that was a gull he had heard...?

Love of women, Love of life....! Mighty factors—almost supreme. Yet a mortal has stayed in a wrecked stokehold, amid the scalding steam, to find and shut a valve; Leper Settlements have their doctors and pastor; and ”A very gallant Gentleman” walks unhesitatingly into an Antarctic blizzard, to show there is a love stronger and higher even than these.

The Engineer Lieutenant was concerned with none of these fine thoughts. For one second he did pause, looking about as if for somewhere to put his pipe. Then he tossed it on to the deck, scrambled over the rail, took a deep breath, and dived.

The Marine sentry ran to the side of the ship.

"*Christ!*" he gasped, and forsook his post, to cry the tale aloud along the seething battery.

The ship shuddered as the engines were reversed, and the water under the stern began to seethe and churn. The Commander had left his cabin, and was racing up to the bridge, as the Captain reached the quarterdeck. A knot of officers gathered on the after-bridge.

"Pin's out, sir!" shouted the Coxswain of the sea-boat, and added under his breath, "Oars all ready, lads! Stan' by to pull like bloody 'ell—there's two of 'em in the ditch...." The boat was hanging a few feet above the tumbling water.

"Slip!" shouted a voice from the invisible fore-bridge. An instant's pause, and the boat dropped with a crash on to a rising wave, There was a clatter and thud of oars in row-locks; the clanking of the chain-slings, and the boat, with her motley-clad[#] life-belted crew, slid off down the slant of a wave. For a moment the glare of an electric light lit the faces of the men, tugging and straining grimly at their oars; then she vanished, to reappear a moment later on the crest of a sea, and disappeared again into the darkness.

[#] Any one near the boat responds to the call "Away Life-boat's crew!"

The Commander on the fore-bridge snatched up a megaphone, shouting down-wind—

"Pull to starboard, cutter! Make for the life-buoy light!"

The watchers on the after-bridge were peering into the night with binoculars and glasses. The A.P. extended an arm and forefinger: "There's the life-buoy—there! ... Now—there! D'you see it? You can just see the flare when it lifts on a wave.... Ah! That's better!"

The dazzling white beam from a search-light on the fore-bridge leaped suddenly into the night. "Now we can see the cutter—" the beam wavered a moment and finally steadied. "Yes, there they are.... I say, there's a devil of a sea running."

"Ripping sea-boats our Service cutters are," said another, staring through his glasses. "They'll live in almost anything; but this isn't a dangerous sea. The skipper 'll turn in a minute and make a lee for them."

"Think old Shortie reached the buoy?"

”Probably swimming about looking for the other fellow, if I know anything of him; who did he go in after?”

”One of the duty sub.—they were securing the anchor or something forward, and the bowline slipped——”

”By gad! He’s got him! There’s the buoy—yes, two of them. *Good* old Shortie.... My God! *Good* old Shortie!” The speaker executed a sort of war-dance and trod on the Paymaster’s toes.

”When you’ve quite finished, Snatcher.... By the way, what about hot-water bottles—blankets—stimulants.... First aid: come along! ’Assure the patient in a loud voice that he is safe.’ ... ’Aspect cheerful but subdued.’ ... I learned the whole rigmarole once!”

From the fore upper bridge the Captain was handling his ship like a picket-boat.

”’Midships—steady! Stop both!” He raised his mouth from the voice-pipe to the helmsman, and nodded to the Officer of the Watch. ”She’ll do now.... The wind ’ll take her down.”

The Commander leaned over the rail and called the Boatswain’s Mate—

”Clear lower deck! Man the falls!”

The ranks of men along the ship’s side turned inboard, and passed the ropes aft, in readiness to hoist the boat. There were three hundred men on the falls, standing by to whisk the cutter to the davit-heads like a cockle-shell.

”They’ve got ’em—got ’em both!” murmured the deep voices: they spat impatiently. ”What say, lads? Stamp an’ go with ’er?”

”Silence in the battery! *Marry*!”

The Commander was leaning over the bridge rails; the Surgeon and two Sick-berth Stewards were waiting by the davits. Alongside the cutter was rising and falling on the waves....

”All right, sir!” The voice of the Coxswain came up as if from the deep. They had hooked the plunging boat on somehow, and his thumb-nail was a pulp....

Three hundred pairs of eyes turned towards the fore-bridge.

”*Hoist away!*”

No need for the Boatswain’s Mate to echo the order; no need for the Petty Officers’ ”With a will, then, lads!” They rushed aft in a wild stampede, hauling with every ounce of beef and strength in their bodies. The cutter, dripping and swaying, her crew fending her off the rolling ship with their stretchers, shot up to the davits.

”High ’nough!”

The rush stopped like one man. Another pull on the after-fall—enough. She was hoisted. ”*Walk back! ... Lie to!*”

A tense silence fell upon the crowded battery: the only sound that of men

breathing hard. A limp figure was seen descending the Jacob's ladder out of the boat, assisted by two of the crew. Heady hands were outstretched to help, and the next moment Willie Sparling, Ordinary Seaman, Official Number 13728, was once more on the deck of a man-of-war—a place he never expected to see again.

"Ow!" He winced, "Min' my shoulder—it's 'urted...." He looked round at the familiar faces lit by the electric lights, and jerked his head back at the boat hanging from her davits. "*'E* saved my life—look after 'im. 'E's a ... e's a—bleedin' 'ero, ..." and Willie Sparling, with a broken collar-bone, collapsed dramatically enough.

The Engineer Lieutenant swung himself down on to the upper deck and stooped to wring the water from his trousers. The Surgeon seized him by the arm—-

"Come along, Shortie—in between the blankets with you!"

The hero of the moment disengaged his arm and shook himself like a terrier. "Blankets be blowed—it's my Middle Watch."

The Surgeon laughed. "Plenty of time for that: it's only just after half-past nine. What about a hot toddy?"

"Lord! I thought I'd been in the water for hours.... Yes, by Jove! a hot toddy——" He paused and looked round, his face suddenly anxious. "By the way, ... 'any one seen a pipe sculling about...?"

Down below the telegraph gongs clanged, and the ship's bows swung round on to her course, heading once more for England, Home, and Beauty.

XXIV.

"A PICTURESQUE CEREMONY."

"S—— Parish Church was, yesterday afternoon, the scene of a picturesque ceremony...."—*Local Paper.*

The Torpedo Lieutenant (hereinafter known as "Torps") was awakened by the June sunlight streaming in through the open scuttle of his cabin. Overhead the quarterdeck-men were busy scrubbing decks: the grating murmur of the holy-stones and swish of water from the hoses, all part of each day's familiar routine, sent his eyes round to the clock ticking on the chest of drawers.

For a while he lay musing, watching with thoughtful gaze the disc of blue

sky framed by the circle of the scuttle; then, as if in obedience to a sudden resolution, he threw back the bed-clothes and hoisted himself out of his bunk. Slipping his feet into a pair of ragged sandals, he left his cabin and walked along the flat till he came to another a few yards away; this he entered, drawing the curtain noiselessly.

The occupant of the bunk was still asleep, breathing evenly and quietly, one bare forearm, with the faint outline of a snake tattooed upon it, lying along the coverlet. For a few moments the new-comer stood watching the sleeper, the corners of his eyes creased in a little smile. Men sometimes smile at their friends that way, and at their dogs. The face on the pillow looked very boyish, somehow, ... he hadn't changed much since *Britannia* days, really; and they had been through a good deal between then and now. Wholesome, lean old face it was; no wonder a woman...

The sleeper stirred, sighed a little, and opened his eyes. For a moment they rested, clear and direct as an awakened child's, on Torps' face; then he laughed a greeting—

"Hullo, Torps!" He yawned and stretched, and rising on one elbow, thrust his head out of the scuttle. "Thank Heaven for a fine day! Number One back from leave yet?"

"Yes, he's back: you're quite safe."

The other lay back in the bunk. "Has Phillips brought my tea yet?" He looked round helplessly. "What an awful pot-mess my cabin is in. Those are presents that came last night—they've all got to be packed. What's the time? Why, it's only half-past seven! Torps, you are the limit! I swear I've always read in books that fellows stayed in bed till lunch on these occasions, mugging up the marriage-service. I'm not going to get up in the middle of the night—be blowed if I do!"

Torps lit a cigarette. "That's only in books. We'll have breakfast, and take your gear up to the hotel, and then we'll play nine holes of golf—just to take our minds off frivolous subjects."

"Golf! My dear old ass, I couldn't drive a yard!"

"Well, you're going to have a try, anyway. Everything's arranged that can be: you aren't allowed to drink cocktails; you can't see Her—till two o'clock. You'd fret yourself into a fever here in bed—what else do you think you're going to do?"

The prospective bridegroom stirred his tea in silence. "Well, I suppose there's something in all that; pass me a cigarette—there's a box just there.... Oh, thanks, old bird; don't quite know why I should be treated as if I were an irresponsible and feeble-minded invalid, just because I'm going to be married."

The Best Man laughed. "How d'you feel about it yourself?"

"H'm.... D'you remember one morning at Kao-chu—was that the name of the place? It began to dawn, and we saw those yellow devils coming up, a thousand or so of the blighters: we had a half-company and no maxim, d'you remember? It was dev'lish cold, and we wanted our breakfasts, ... and we were about sixteen?"

Torps smiled recollection. "Bad's that?"

"Very nearly."

"I remember—what they call in the quack advertisements 'That Sickish Feeling'! Never mind, turn out and scrape your face; you'll feel much better after your bath——"

Outside in the flat the voice of some one carolling drew near—

"*For* ... it is ... my *wed*—ding *MOR*- ... ning....!"

The victim groaned. "Oh Lord! Now they're going to start being comic."

"All right; it's only the Indiarubber Man."[#] The curtain was drawn back and a smiling face, surmounted by a shock of ruddy hair, thrust into the cabin—

[#] Lieutenant for Physical Training Duties.

"'Morning, Guns! Many happy returns of the day, and all that sort of thing. Merry and bright?"

The Gunnery Lieutenant forced a wan smile. "Quite—thanks."

"That's right! And our Torps in attendance with smelling salts.... Condemned man suffered Billington to pinion him without Resistance——"

The bridegroom sat up, searching for a missile. "Look here, for goodness' sake.... That 'Condemned man' business 's been done before. All the people who tell funny stories about fellows being married——"

"Tut, tut! Tuts in two places! A pretty business, forsooth! Sense of humour going. Beginning of the end. Fractious. Tongue furred, for all we know.... Where's the Young Doc.? I suggest a thorough medical examination before it's too late——" Another face appeared grinning in the doorway. "Why, here he is! Doc., don't you think a stringent medical examination——"

The Gunnery Lieutenant crawled reluctantly out of his bunk. "You two needn't come scrapping in here. I'm going to shave, and I don't want to cut my face off!"

The visitors helped themselves to cigarettes. "We don't want to scrap: we want to see you shave, Guns. Watch him lathering himself with aspen hand!" They explored the cardboard-boxes and parcels that littered all available space. "Did you ever see such prodigal generosity as the man's friends display! Toast-

rack—no home complete without one—Card-case!"—they probed among the tissue wrappings. "Case of pipes.... Handsome ormulu timepiece, suitably inscribed. My Ghost! Guns—almost thou persuadest me ..."

"Yes, those things came last night: people are awfully kind——"

The Torpedo Lieutenant intervened. "Come on, give him a chance—I'll never get him dressed with you two messing about."

The Gunnery Lieutenant grinned above the lather at his reflection in the mirror. "D'you hear that! That's the way he's been going on ever since I woke up. One would think I had G.P.I.!" The visitors prepared to depart. "You have my profound sympathy, Torps," said the Surgeon. "I was Best Man to a fellow once—faith, I kept him under morphia till it was all over. He was practically no trouble."

"Now I'm going to get my bath," said the Torpedo Lieutenant when the well-wishers had taken their departure. "Shove on any old clothes: we'll send your full-dress up to the hotel, and your boxes to the house; and you needn't worry your old head about anything."

Torps left the cabin; there was a tap at the door and a private of Marines entered, surveying the Gunnery Lieutenant with affectionate regard. "I just come in to see if we was turnin' out, sir. Razor all right? Better 'ave a 'ot bath this mornin', sir!" His master's unaccountable predilection for immersing his body in cold water every morning was a custom that not even twelve years of familiarity had robbed of its awfulness. "I strip right down an' 'ad a bath meself, sir, mornin' I was spliced," he admitted, as one who condones generously an inexplicable weakness, "but it were a 'ot one. You'd best 'ave it 'ot, sir!"

His master laughed. "No, thanks, Phillips; it's all right as it is. Will you be up at the house this afternoon and lend a hand, after the ceremony?"

The Private of Marines nodded sorrowfully. "I understands, sir. I bin married meself—I knows all the routine, as you might say." He departed with a sigh that left a faint reminiscence of rum in the morning air, and the Gunnery Lieutenant proceeded with his toilet, humming a little tune under his breath. Half an hour later he entered the Wardroom clad in comfortable grey flannels and an old shooting-coat. The Mess, breakfasting, received him with a queer mixture of chaff and solicitude. The First Lieutenant grinned over a boiled egg: "Guns, sorry I couldn't get back earlier to relieve you, but 'urgent private affairs,' you know."

"All right, Number One! As long as you got back before two o'clock this afternoon, that's all I cared about." He helped himself to bacon and poured out a cup of coffee.

"Marvellous!" The Indiarubber Man opposite feigned breathless interest in his actions, and murmured something into his cup about condemned men par-

taking of hearty breakfasts.

"Come on, that's enough of the 'Condemned man'! You'd better find out something about a Groomsman's duties," said the Best Man, coming to the rescue of his principal.

"Am I a Groomsman? So I am—I'd forgotten. What do I do? Show people to their seats: 'this way please, madam, second shop through on the right.' ... Have you any rich aunts, Guns? 'Pon my word, I might get off this afternoon—you never know. 'Every nice girl loves a sailor....' Which of the lucky bridesmaids falls to my lot? Do I kiss the bride...?"

"You try it on," retorted the prospective husband grimly.'

"Can't I kiss anybody," inquired the Indiarubber Man plaintively.

"Not if they see you coming, I shouldn't think," cut in the Paymaster from behind his paper.

"Then the head waiter and I will retire behind a screen and get quietly drunk—I don't suppose anybody will want to kiss him either: they never do, somehow. We shall drift together, blighted misogamists...."

The Engineer Commander glowered at the speaker. "Suppose ye reserve a little of this unpar-r-ralleled wit——"

"I will, Chief—beg pardon. But there's something about a wedding morning—don't you know? Screams-of-fun-and-roars-of-laughter sort of atmosphere." He looked round the silent table. "Now I've annoyed everybody. Ah, me! What it is to have to live with mouldy messmates, ..." and the Indiarubber Man drifted away to the smoking-room.

"He ought to keep your little show from getting dull this afternoon," said the First Lieutenant.

The Gunnery Lieutenant laughed. "Yes, it's pleasant to find some one who does regard it as a joke. The only trouble is that his bridesmaid is my young sister, a flapper from school, and I know he'll make her giggle in the middle of the service. She doesn't want much encouragement at any time." The speaker finished a leisurely breakfast and filled his pipe.

"Now then, Torps, I'm ready for you and your nine holes...."

II.

The Gunnery Lieutenant sat down and began laboriously dragging on his Wellington boots. His Best Man stood in front of the glass adjusting the medals on the breast of his full-dress coat. This concluded to his satisfaction, he picked

up a prayer-book from the dressing-table—

"Now, then, Guns, a 'dummy-run,'" and read; "N. Wilt thou have this woman——"

"Why 'N'?" objected the prospective bridegroom.

"Dunno, It says 'N' here."

"I've never heard a parson say 'N,'" ventured the other, "but it's years since I saw a wedding—chuck me my braces—Well, go on." The Best Man continued.

"I know that part. That's the 'I will' business,—by the way, where's the ring? Don't, for Heaven's sake, let it out of your sight—are my trousers hitched up too high...?"

"No, they're all right. Then you say: 'I, N, take thee, N——'"

"More N's. We can't both be N—must be a misprint...." He seized the book. "Have I got to learn all that by heart? Why don't they have a Short Course at Greenwich, or Whaley, or somewhere, about these things. "I, 'N,' take thee, 'N'"—he began reading the words feverishly.

"No—that's all right. You repeat it after the parson. And you say, 'I, John Willie,' or whatever your various names might be, 'take thee, Millicent'—d'you see? Here, let me fix that epaulette."

"Give me a cigarette, for Heaven's sake." He hurriedly scanned the pages. "Ass I was to leave it so late.... What awful things they talk about.... Why didn't I insist on a Registry Office? Or can't you get married over a pair of tongs somewhere—what religion's that?"

"Don't know—Gretna Green, or something. It's too late now. Do stand still.... Right! Where's your sword.... Gloves?" He stepped back and surveyed his handiwork, smiling his whimsical, half-grave smile. For a few seconds the two men stood looking at each other, and the thoughts that passed through their minds were long, long thoughts.

"You'll do," said the Torpedo Lieutenant at length, but there was an absent look in his eyes, as though his thoughts had gone a long way beyond the spare, upright figure in blue and gold. In truth they had: back fifteen years or more to a moonlit night in the club garden at Malta. Two midshipmen had finished dinner (roast chicken, rum-omelette, "Scotch-woodcock," and all the rest of it), and were experimenting desperately with two cigars. It was Ladies' Night, and down on the terrace a few officers' wives were dining with their husbands; the Flagship's band was playing softly.

"A fellow must make up his mind, Bill," one of the midshipmen had said. "It's either one thing or the other—either the Service or Women. You can't serve both; and it seems to me that the Service ought to come first." And there and then they had vowed eternal celibacy for the benefit of the Navy, upon which, under the good providence of God, the Honour, Safety, and Welfare of the Nation do

most chiefly depend.

Fifteen years ago...!

"You'll do," repeated the Torpedo Lieutenant in a matter-of-fact tone, and rang the bell.

Private Phillips of the Royal Marine Light Infantry entered with a gold-necked bottle and two tumblers. The cork popped and the two officers raised their glasses—

"Happy days!" said Torps.

"Salue!" replied the other, and for a moment his eyes rested on his Best Man with something half-wistful in their regard. "D'you remember Aldershot...? The Middles: you seconded me, and we split a bottle afterwards...?"

Torps nodded, smiling. "But this is 'Just before the battle, mother!'" They moved towards the door, and for a moment he rested his hand on the heavy epaulette beside his. "An' if you make as good a show of this as you did that afternoon, you won't come to no 'arm, old son."

III.

They were greeted at the church door by the beaming Indiarubber Man.

"Come along in—spot or plain?—I mean Bride or Bridegroom? Bride's friends on the left and Bridegroom's on the right—or is it the other way about? I'm getting so rattled.... I've just put the old caretaker in a front pew under the impression that it was your rich aunt, Guns! What a day, what a day! Got the ring, Torps? Here come the Bridesmaids, bless 'em! Go on, you two, get up into your proper billets.... 'The condemned man walked with unfaltering step'—oh, sorry, I forgot...."

The Groomsmen slid into their pew with much rattling of sword-scabbards and nodding of heads and whispering. On their gilded shoulders appeared to lie the responsibility of the whole affair.

The Bridegroom took up his appointed place and stood, his hands linked behind his back, looking down the aisle to where the choir was gathering. The church seemed a sea of faces, glinting uniforms, and women's finery. Who on earth were they all? He had no idea he knew so many people.... Quite sure Millicent didn't.... How awful it must be to have to preach a sermon.... The faint scent of lilies drifted up to where he was standing. At his side Torps shifted his

feet, and the ferrule of his scabbard clinked on the aisle. Dear old Torps! ... How he must be hating it all.

There was a faint stir at the entrance. The Bridesmaids' black velvet hats and white feathers were bobbing agitatedly. He caught a glimpse of a white-veiled figure. People were turning round, staring and whispering. Dash it all! It wasn't a circus.... What did they think they were here for?

"There she is," murmured Torps. "Not much longer now."

The clergyman was giving out the number of a hymn from the back of the church somewhere, and the deep, sweet notes of the organ poured out over their heads: then the voices of the choir-boys swelled up, drawing nearer.... Again the scent of lilies.

"Stand by," from Torps, tensely.

The choir-boys filed past, singing; one had on a red tie that peeped above his cassock. They glanced at him indifferently as they went by, their heads on a level with his belt-buckle.... Then the white-veiled figure on the Colonel's arm—Millicent: his, in a few short minutes, for ever and aye.... He drew a deep breath.

"*Dearly beloved, we are gathered together here in the sight of God....*" Torps touched him lightly on the elbow.

* * * * *

"*I, John Mainprice Edgar...*"

"I, John Mainprice Edgar:"

"*Take thee, Millicent...*"

"Take thee, Millicent:"

* * * * *

"*To have and to hold...*"

This was simple enough—"To have and to hold:"

* * * * *

"And thereto I plight thee my troth."

How warm and steady the small hand was, lying in his: then gently withdrawn. Torps was trying to attract attention—What was his trouble? The ring—Of course, the ring....

* * * * *

"Those whom, God hath joined together let no man put asunder."

* * * * *

Life's haven at last! Or had all life been a cruise within the harbour: and this the beat to open sea ... The Brave Adventure?

* * * * *

"The peace of God which passeth all understanding ... remain with you now and for evermore."

* * * * *

There was a whisper of silken petticoats, and the clink of swords seems to fill the church: then, dominating all other sounds for a moment, the old Colonel blowing his nose vehemently....

Down the aisle again, the organ thundering familiar strains—familiar, yet suddenly imbued with a personal and intimate message,—Millicent's arm resting on his, trembling ever so lightly....

In the warm, bouquet-scented gloom of the vestry they gathered, and Torps wrung the Bridegroom's hand in a hard, unaccustomed grip—Torps with his winning, half-sad smile, and the hair over his temples showing the first trace of grey.... The bride finished signing the register, and rose smiling, with the veil thrown back from her fair face. In later years he found himself recalling a little sadly (as the happiest of bachelors may do at times) the queer, shining gladness in her eyes. He bent and touched the warm cheek with his lips.

Then for a minute every one seemed to fall a-kissing. Father and daughter, Mother and son, newly-made brothers- and sisters-in-law sought each other in turn. The Bridegroom's Lady Mother kissed the Indiarubber Man because no one else seemed to want to, and they were such old friends. The Clergyman kissed two of the Bridesmaids because he was their uncle, and the Colonel (who had stopped blowing his nose and was cheering up) kissed the other two because he wasn't. In the middle of all this pleasant exercise Torps, who had vanished for a minute, reappeared to announce that the Arch of Swords was ready and the carriages were alongside.

So the procession formed up once more: Bride and Bridegroom, the Colonel and the Bridegroom's Lady Mother: Torps leading the Bridegroom's new sister-

in-law (and a very pretty sister-in-law she was), the Flapper and the Indiarubber Man, a girl called Etta Someone on the Junior Watch-keeper's arm, and another called Doris Somebody Else under the escort of the A.P. They all passed beneath the arch of naked blades held up by the Bridegroom's messmates and friends, to receive a running fire of chaff and laughing congratulation; to find outside in the golden afternoon sunshine that the horses had been taken from the carriage-traces, and a team of lusty blue-jackets, all very perspiring and serious of mien, waiting to do duty instead.

IV.

Private Phillips, R.M.L.I., in all subsequent narrations of the events of the day—and they were many and varied—was wont to preface each reminiscence with "Me an' the Torpedo Lootenant..." And indeed he did both indefatigable workers bare justice. Whether it was opening carriage doors or bottles of champagne, fetching fresh supplies of glasses or labelling and strapping portmanteaux, Private Phillips laboured with the same indomitable stertorous energy. He accepted orders with an omniscient and vehement nod of the head; usurped the duties of enraptured maid-servants with, "You leave me do it, Miss—I bin married meself. I knows the routine, as you might say...."

And Torps, superintending the distribution of beer to panting blue-jackets (whose panting, in some cases, was almost alarming in its realism); fetching cups of tea for stout dowagers, and ices for giggling schoolgirls; begging a sprig from the bridesmaids' bouquets; tipping policemen; opening telegrams; yet always with an attention ready for the Bridegroom's aunt who remembered Guns as such a *little* boy.... Helpful even to the ubiquitous reporter of the local paper....

"A picturesque ceremony—if I may say so. A *most* picturesque ceremony." The reporter would feel for his notebook. "Might I ask who that tall Officer is with the medals...? My Paper——" And Torps, with his gentle manners and quiet smile, would supply the information to the best of his ability, conscious that at a wedding there are harder lots even than the Best Man's....

The Indiarubber Man drifted disconsolately about in the crush, finally coming to a momentary anchorage in a corner beside his Bridesmaid.

"Miss Betty, no one loves me, and I'm going into the garden"—he dropped his voice to a confidential undertone—"to eat worms."

The girl giggled weakly. "Please don't make me laugh any more! Won't you stay here and have an ice instead? I'm sure it would be much better for you."

”Would it, d’you think? I’ve been watching the sailors drinking beer. Have you ever seen a sailor drink beer, Miss Betty? It’s a grim sight.”

She shook her head, and there was both laughter and reproach in the young eyes considering him over the bouquet. ”You forsook me—and a nice Midshipman had pity on my loneliness and brought me an ice.”

The Indiarubber Man eyed her sorrowfully. ”I turn my back for a moment to watch sailors drink beer—I am a man of few recreations—and return to find you sighing over the memory of another and making shocking bad puns. Really, Miss Betty—Ah! *Now* I can understand....”

A small and pink-faced Midshipman approached with two brimming glasses of champagne. The Indiarubber Man faded discreetly away, leaving his charge and her new-found knight pledging each other with sparkling eyes.

The Bride touched her husband’s sleeve in a lull in the handshaking and congratulations. ”Isn’t it rather nice to see people enjoying themselves! Don’t you feel as if you wanted everybody to be as happy as we?—*Look* at Betty and that boy.... Champagne, if you please! How ill the child will be; and she’s got to go back to school to-morrow....”

Her husband laughed softly. ”Pretty little witch.... Torps has taken it away from her and given her some lemonade instead. Where’s Mother?—Oh, I see: hobnobbing with the Colonel over a cup of tea. What a crush! Dear, can’t we escape soon....?”

”Very soon now—poor boy, are you very hot in those things?”

”Not very. The worst part’s coming—the rice and slippers and good-byes. Are you very tired, darling...?”

* * * * *

”Good-bye—Good-bye! Good-bye, Daddie.... Yes, yes.... I will.... Good-bye, Betty darling.... Good-bye——”

* * * * *

”Good-bye, Mother mine.... Torps, you’ve been a brick..... So-long! Good-bye! ... Not down my neck, Betty! ... Yes, I’ve got the tickets—— Good-bye, Good-bye!——”

* * * * *

The lights of Dover were twinkling far astern. Two people, a man and a woman, walked to the stern of the steamer and stood close together, leaning over the rail.

”What a lot of Good-byes we’ve said to-day,” murmured the woman, watching the pin-points of light that vanished and reappeared. She fell silent, as if following a train of thought, ”And after all, we’re only going to Paris!”

”We’re going further than that——” The man took possession of her slim, ungloved hands, and the star-powdered heavens alone were witness to the act. ”All the way to El Dorado, darling!”

She gave him back the pressure of his fingers, and presently sighed a little, happily, as a child sighs in its sleep. ”And we haven’t any return tickets....”

V.

The members of the wedding party returned to the ship and straggled into the Mess. Each one as he entered unbuckled his sword-belt, loosened his collar, and called for strong waters. A gloom lay upon the gathering: possibly the shadow of an angel’s wing.

”I feel as if I’d been to a funeral,” growled the Paymaster. ”Awful shows these weddings are!”

”Poor old Guns!” said the A.P. lugubriously.

”She’s a jolly nice girl, any way,” maintained the Young Doctor.

”Yes,” sighed the Junior Watch-keeper, ”but still.... He *was* a good chap....”

The Indiarubber Man was the last to enter. He added his sword to the heap already on the table, glanced at the solemn countenances of his messmates, and lit a cigarette.

”*Sunt rerum lachrimæ.* I am reminded of a harrowing story,” he began, leaning against the tiled stove, ”recounted to me by a—a lady.

”We met in London, at a place of popular entertainment, and our acquaintance was, judged by the standards of conventionality, perhaps slender.” The Indiarubber Man paused and looked gravely from face to face. ”However,” he continued, ”encouraged by my frank open countenance and sympathetic manner, she was constrained to tell the story of how she once loved and lost....”

The narrator broke off and appeared to have forgotten how the story went on, in dreamy contemplation of his cigarette. The mess waited in silence: at length the Junior Watch-keeper could bear it no longer.

”What *did* she tell you?”

The Indiarubber Man thoughtfully exhaled a cloud of smoke. ”She said: ’Pa

shot 'im.... Sniff!—*'Ow* I loved 'im.... Sniff!—Lor', 'ow 'e did bleed.' ..."

XXV.

WHY THE GUNNER WENT ASHORE.

The evening mail had come, and Selby sat alone in his cabin mechanically reading and re-reading a letter. Finally he tore it up into very small pieces and held them clenched in his hand, staring very hard at nothing in particular.

He was engaged to be married: or to be more precise, he had been engaged. The letter that had come by the evening mail said that this was not so any longer.

The girl who wrote it was a very straight-forward person who hated concealment of facts because they were unpleasant. It had become necessary to tell Selby that she couldn't love him any longer, and, faith, she had told him. Further, by her creed, it was only right that she should tell him about Someone Else as well.

It was all very painful, and the necessity for thus putting things to Selby in their proper light, had cost her sleepless nights, red eyes, and much expensive notepaper, before the letter was finally posted. But she did hope he would realise it was For the Best, ... and some day he would be so thankful.... It had all been a Big Mistake, because she wasn't a bit what he thought, ... and so forth. A very distressing letter to have to write, and, from Selby's point of view, even more distressing to have to read.

Few men enjoy being brought up against their limitations thus abruptly, especially where Women and Love are concerned. In Selby's case was added the knowledge that another had been given what he couldn't hold. He had made a woman love him, but he couldn't make her go on loving him.... He was insufficient unto the day.

Critics with less biassed judgment might have taken a different point of view: might have said she was a jilt, or held she acted a little cruelly: gone further, even, and opined he was well out of it. But Selby was one of those who walk the earth under a ban of idealism and had never been seriously in love before. She was the Queen who could do no wrong. It was he who had been weighed and found wanting. If only he had acted differently on such and such an occasion. If, in short, instead of being himself he had been somebody quite different all along....

Succeeding days and nights provided enough matches and sulphur of this sort to enable him to fashion a sufficiently effective purgatory, in which his mind revolved round its hurt like a cockchafer on a pin.

When a man depends for the efficient performance of his duties upon getting his just amount of sleep (Selby was a watch-keeping Lieutenant in a battleship of the line), affairs of this sort are apt to end in disaster. But his ship went into Dockyard hands to refit, and Selby, who was really a sensible enough sort of fellow, though an idealist, realised that for his own welfare and that of the Service it were "better to forget and smile than remember and be sad." Accordingly he applied for and obtained a week's leave, bought a map of the surrounding district, packed a few necessaries into a light knapsack, and set off to walk away his troubles.

For a day he followed the coast—it was high summer—along a path that skirted the cliffs. The breeze blew softly off the level *lapis-lazuli* of the Channel, sea-gulls wheeled overhead for company, and following the curve of each ragged headland in succession, the creamy edge of the breakers lured him on towards the West. He walked thirty miles that day and slept dreamlessly in a fishing village hung about with nets and populated by philosophers with patched breeches.

He struck inland the second day, to plunge into a confusion of lanes that led him blindfold for a while between ten-foot hedges. These opened later into red coombes, steeped to their sunny depths with the scent of fern and may, and all along the road bees held high carnival above the hedgerows. Then green tunnels of foliage, murmurous with wood-pigeon, dappled him at each step with alternate sunlight and shadow, and passed him on to villages whose inns had cool, flagged parlours, and cider in blue-and-white mugs. An ambient trout-stream held him company most of the long afternoon, with at times a kingfisher darting along its tortuous course like a streak from the rainbow that each tiny waterfall had caught and held.

He supped early in a farm kitchen off new-made pasties, apple tart and yellow-crusted cream, and walked on till the bats began wheeling overhead in the violet dusk. His ship was sixty miles away when he crept into the shelter of a hayrick and laid his tired head on his knapsack.

The third day found him up on the ragged moors, steering north. The exercise and strong salt wind had driven the sad humours from him, and the affairs of life were beginning to resume their right perspective; so much so that when, about noon, a sore heel began abruptly to make itself felt (in the irrational way sore heels have), Selby sat down and pulled out his map. The day before yesterday he would have pushed on doggedly, almost welcoming the counter-irritant of physical discomfort. To-day, however, he accepted the inevitable and searched the map for some neighbouring village where he could rest a day or so

until the chafed foot was healed.

After a while he turned east, and, leaving the high moorland, discerned the smoke of chimneys among some trees in the valley. He descended a steep road that seemed to lead in the right direction, and presently caught a glimpse of a square church tower among some elms; later on the breeze bore the faint cawing of rooks up the hillside. A stream divided the valley: the few cottages clustered on the opposite side huddled close together as if reluctant to venture far beyond the shadow of the grey church. The green of the hillside behind them was gashed in one place by an old quarry; but the work had long been abandoned, and Nature had already begun to repair the red scar with impatient furz and whinberry.

So much Selby took in as he descended past the grey church and cawing rooks; once at the bottom and across the quaint, square-arched bridge, he found there was a small inn amongst the huddled cottages, where they would receive him for a night or two.

He lunched, did what he could to the blistered heel with a darning needle and worsted (after the fashion of blistered sailormen), and took a light siesta in the lavender-smelling bedroom under the roof until it was time for tea. Tea over, he lit a pipe, borrowed his host's little 9 ft. trout rod that hung in the passage, and limped down to the meadows skirting the stream beyond the village.

The light occupation gave him something to think about; and, held by the peace of running water, he lingered by the stream till evening. Then something of his old sadness came back with the dimpsey light,—a gentle melancholy that only resembled sorrow "as the mist resembles the rain." He wanted his supper, too, and so walked slowly back to the village with the rod on his shoulder. The inn-keeper met him at the door: "Well done, sir! Well done! Yu'm a fisherman, for sure! Missus, she fry 'un for supper for 'ee now.... Yes, 'tis nice li'l rod—cut un meself: li'l hickory rod, 'tis.... Where did 'ee have that half-pounder, sir? There's many a good fish tu that li'l pool...."

Selby had finished supper and repaired to a bench outside in the gloaming with his pipe and a mug of beer. The old stained chancel windows of the church beyond the river were lit up and choir practice appeared to be in progress. The drone of the organ and voices uplifted in familiar harmonies drifted across to him out of the dusk. The pool below the bridge still mirrored the last gleams of day in the sky: a few old men were leaning over the low parapet smoking, and down the street one or two villagers stood gossiping at their doorsteps. A dog came out of the shadows and sniffed Selby's hands: then he flopped down in the warm dust and sighed to himself. The strains of the organ on the other side of the valley swelled louder:—

"... Holy Ghost the Infinite,

Comforter Divine..."

sang the unseen choir. How warm and peaceful the evening was, reflected Selby, puffing at his pipe, one hand caressing the dog's ear. Extraordinarily peaceful, in fact.... He wondered what sort of a man the vicar was, in this tiny backwater of life, and whether he found it dull....

While he wondered, the vicar came down the road and stopped abreast of him.

"Good evening," he said, half hesitating, and came nearer. "Please don't get up.... I don't want to disturb you, but I—they told me this afternoon that a stranger was staying here. I thought I would make myself known to you: I am the rector of this little parish." He smiled and named himself.

Selby responded to the introduction. "Won't you sit down for a few minutes? I was listening to your choir——"

"They are practising—yes: I have just come down from the church and," he hesitated. "I hoped I should find you in—to have the opportunity of making your acquaintance."

"It was most kind of you." Selby wondered if all parsons in this fair country were as attentive to the stranger within their gates. "Most kind," he repeated. "I—I was on a walking tour, and"—he indicated a slipper of his host's that adorned his left foot—"one of my heels began to chafe—only a blister, you know; but I thought I'd take things easy for a day or two....

"Quite so, quite so. An enforced rest is sometimes very pleasant. I remember once, my throat.... However, that was not what I came to see you about. I believe, Mr Selby, er—am I right in supposing that you are in the Navy?"

"Yes." A note of chilliness had crept into Selby's voice. After all, his clerical acquaintance was only an inquisitive old busybody, agog to pry into other people's affairs. "Yes," he repeated, "I'm a Lieutenant," and he named his ship.

The rector made a little deprecatory gesture. "Please don't think I am trying to acquire the materials for gossip; and I am not asking out of inquisitiveness. The good people here told me this afternoon—this is an out-of-the-way place, and strangers, distinguished ones, if I may say so," he made a little inclination of the head, "do not come here very frequently: they mentioned it to me as I was passing on my way to hold a confirmation class...."

Selby hastened to put him at his ease. After all, why shouldn't he ask? And then he remembered offering the inn-keeper a fill of hard, Navy plug tobacco. He carried a bit in his knapsack with a view to just such small courtesies. "That's the stuff, sir," the man had said, loading his pipe. "We wondered, me an' the missus, was you a Naval gentleman...?"

But while his mind busied itself over these recollections his companion was

talking on in his, gentle way.

"... He is not a very old man: but the Doctor tells me he has lived a life of many hardships, and not, I fear, always a temperate one. However, 'Never a sinner, never a saint,' ... and now he is fast—to use one of his own seafaring expressions—'slipping his cable.' He retired from the Navy as a Gunner, I think. That would be a Warrant Officer's rank, would it not?"

Selby nodded. "Yes. Has he been retired long, this person you speak of?"

"Yes, he retired a good many years ago, and has a small pension quite sufficient for his needs. He settled here because he liked the quiet——" The speaker made a little gesture, embracing the hollow in the hills, sombre now in the gathering darkness. "He lives a very lonely life in a cottage some little distance along the road. An eccentric old man, with curious ideas of beautifying a home.... However, I am digressing. As far as I know he has no relatives alive, and no friends ever visit him. He has been bed-ridden for some time, and the wife of one of my parishioners, a most kindly woman, looks in several times a day, and sees he has all he wants.

"Now I come to the part of my story that affects you. Lately, in fact since he took to his bed and the Doctor was compelled to warn him of his approaching end, he has been very anxious to meet some one in the Navy. He so often begs me, if I hear of any one connected with the Service being in the vicinity, to bring him to the cottage. And this afternoon, hearing quite by accident that a Naval Officer was in our midst,"—again the rector made his courteous little inclination of the head—"it seemed an opportunity of gratifying the old fellow's wish—if you could spare a few moments some time to-morrow...?"

"I should be only too glad to be of any service," said Selby. "Perhaps you would call for me some time to-morrow morning, and we could go round together——?"

The rector rose. "You are most kind. I was sure when I saw you—I knew I should not appeal in vain...." He extended his hand. "And now I will say good-night. Forgive me for taking up so much of your time with an old man's concerns. One can do so little in this life to bring happiness to others that when the opportunity arises..."

"Yes, *rather*——!" said Selby a little awkwardly, and shook hands, conscious of more than a slight compunction for his hastiness in judgment of this mild divine. "Good-night, sir," and stood looking after him till he disappeared along the road into the luminous summer night.

Selby had finished breakfast, and was leaning over the pig-sty wall watching his host ministering to the fat sow and her squealing litter, when his acquaintance

of the previous night appeared. Seen in the broad daylight he was an elderly man, short and spare, with placid blue eyes, and a singularly winning smile. A bachelor, so the inn-keeper had instructed Selby; a man of learning and of no small wealth, who, moreover, dressed and threw as pretty a fly as any in the county.

He saluted Selby with a little gesture of his ash-plant, inquired after the blistered heel, and then after an ailing member of the fat sow's litter. "And now, if you are ready and still of the same mind, shall we be strolling along?" he inquired.

Selby fetched his stick, and together they set out along a road made aromatic in the morning sunlight by the scents of dust and flowering hedgerow. Half a mile beyond the village the rector stopped before a gate-way. A dogcart and cob stood at the roadside, and a small boy in charge touched his cap.

"The Doctor is here, I see," said the clergyman, and opened the gate in the hedge. Selby caught a glimpse of a flagged path leading through an orchard to a whitewashed cottage. But his attention from the outset had been arrested by a most extraordinary assortment of crockery, glass and earthenware vases, busts, statuettes, and odds and ends of ironwork that occupied every available inch of space round the gateway, bordering the path, and were even cemented on to the front of the house itself. Above the gateway a defaced lion faced an equally mutilated unicorn across the Royal Arms of England. Arranged beneath, cemented into the pillars of the arch, were busts of Napoleon, Irving, Stanley, and George Washington; an earthenware jar bearing the inscription, "HOT POT"; a little group representing Leda and the Swan in white marble; and a grinning soapstone joss, such as is sold to tourists and sailors at ports on the China coast. Interspersed with these were cups without handles, segments of soup-plates, china dolls'-heads, lead soldiers, and a miscellaneous collection of tea-pot spouts, ... all firmly plastered into the ironwork of the pillars.

On each side of the path, banked up to the height of about three feet, was a further indescribable conglomeration of bric-à-brac, cemented together into a sort of hedge. The general effect was as if the knock-about comedians of a music-hall stage (who break plates and domestic crockery out of sheer joy of living) had combined with demented graveyard masons, bulls in china shops, and all the craftsmen of Murano, to produce a nightmare. A light summer breeze strayed down the valley, and scores of slips of coloured glass, hanging in groups from the apple-trees, responded with a musical tinkling. The sound brought recollections of a Japanese temple garden, and Selby paused to look about him.

"What an extraordinary place!"

The vicar, leading the way up the tiled walk, seemed suddenly to become aware of the strangeness of their surroundings. Long familiarity with the house had perhaps robbed the fantastic decorations of their incongruity. He stopped

and smiled. ”To be sure.... Yes, I had forgotten; to a stranger all this must seem very peculiar. I think I hinted that the old man had very curious ideas of beautifying the home. This was about his only hobby—and yet, oddly enough, he rarely spoke of it to me.”

At that moment the cottage door opened and a tall florid man came out. The vicar turned. ”Ah, Doctor Williams—that was his trap at the gate—let me introduce you....” The introduction accomplished, he inquired after the patient. The medical man shook his head.

”Won’t last much longer, I’m afraid: a day or so at the most. No organic disease, y’know, but just”—he made a little gesture—”like a clock that’s run down. Not an old man either, as men go. But these Navy men age so quickly.... Well, I must get along. I shall look in again this evening, but there is nothing one can do, really. He’s quite comfortable.... Good-morning,” and the Doctor passed down the path to his trap.

The vicar opened the cottage door, and stood aside to allow Selby to enter. The room was partly a kitchen, partly a bedroom; occupying the bed, with a patchwork quilt drawn up under his chin, was a shrunken little old man, with a square beard nearly white, and projecting craggy eyebrows. He turned his head to the door as they entered; in spite of the commanding brows they were dull, tired old eyes, without interest or hope, or curiosity in them.

”I’ve brought you a visitor, Mr Tyelake,” said the vicar. ”Some one you’ll be glad to see: an Officer in the Navy.”

The old man considered Selby with the same vacant, passionless gaze.

”Have you ever ate Navy beef?” he asked abruptly. It was a thin colourless voice, almost the falsetto of the very old. Selby smiled. ”Oh yes, sometimes.”

”Navy beef—that’s what brought me here—an’ the rheumatics. I’m dyin’.” He made the statement with the simple pride of one who has at last achieved a modest distinction.

The vicar asked a few questions touching the old man’s comfort, and opened the little oriel window to admit the morning air. ”Lieutenant Selby was most interested in your unique collection of curios outside, Mr Tyelake. Perhaps you would like to tell him something about them.” He looked at his watch, addressing Selby. ”I have a meeting, I’m afraid.... I don’t know if you’d care to stay a few minutes longer and chat?”

”Certainly,” said Selby, and drew a chair near the bed. ”If Mr Tyelake doesn’t mind, I’d like to stay a little while....” He sat down, and the vicar took his departure, closing the door behind him. In a corner by the dresser a tall grandfather clock ticked out the deliberate seconds; a bluebottle sailed in through the open window and skirmished round the low ceiling.

The old man lay staring at his hands as they lay on the patchwork quilt;

twisted, nubbly hands they were, with something pathetic about their toilworn helplessness. Every now and again the wind brought into the little room the tinkle of the glass ornaments pendent in the apple-trees outside: the faint sound seemed to rouse the occupant of the bed.

"I've seen a mort of religions," he said in a low voice, as if speaking to himself. "Heaps of 'em. An' some said one thing an' some said the other." His old blank eyes followed the gyrations of the fly upon the ceiling. "An' I dunno.... Buddhas an' Me-'ommets, Salvation Armies, an' Bush Baptists, ... an' some says one thing an' some says the other. I dunno..." He shook his head wearily. "But many's the pot of galvanised paint I used up outside there ... an' goldleaf, in the dog-watches a-Saturdays."

This, then, was the explanation of the fantastic decorations outside. Altars to the unknown God! The old man turned his head towards his visitor. "But don't you tell the parson. He wouldn't hold with it.... I tell you because you're in the Navy, an' p'r'aps you'd understand. I was in the Navy—Mr Tyelake's my name. Thirty year a Gunner; an' Navy beef——" For a while the old man rambled on, seemingly unconscious of his visitor's presence, of ships long passed through the breakers' yards, of forgotten commissions all up and down the world, of beef and rheumatism and Buddha, while Selby sat listening, half moved by pity, half amused at himself for staying on.

About noon a woman came in and fed the old man with a spoon out of a cup. Selby rose to go. "I'll come again," he said, touching the passive hands covered with faint blue tattooing. "I'll come and see you again this evening." The old man roused himself from his reveries. "Come again," he repeated, "that's right, come again—soon. When she's gone—she an' her fussin' about," and for the first time an expression came into his eyes, as he watched the woman with the cup, an expression of malevolence. "I don't hold with women ... fussin' round. An' I've got something to tell you: something pressin'. You must come soon; I'm slippin' my cable.... Navy beef *an'* the rheumatics—an' it's to your advantage...."

The shadows of the alders by the river were lengthening when Selby again walked up the bricked path leading to the cottage. The old man was still lying in contemplation of his hands: the grandfather clock had stopped, and there was a great stillness in the little room.

His gaze was so vacant and the silence remained unbroken so long that Selby doubted if the old man recognised him.

"I've come back, you see. I've come to see you again." Still the figure in the bed said nothing, staring dully at his visitor. "I've come to see you again," Selby repeated.

"It's to your advantage," said the old man. His voice was weaker, and it was evident that he was, as he said, slipping his cable fast.

”Give me that there ditty-box,” continued the thin, toneless voice. Selby looked round the room, and espied on a corner of the chest of drawers the scrubbed wooden ”ditty-box” in which sailors keep their more intimate and personal possessions: he fetched it and placed it on the patchwork quilt; the old man fumbled ineffectually with the lid.

”Tip ’em out,” he said at length, and Selby inverted the box to allow a heap of papers and odds and ends to slide on to the old man’s hands. It was a pathetic collection, the flotsam and jetsam of a sailor’s life: faded photographs, certificates from Captains scarcely memories with the present generation, a frayed parchment, letters tied up with an old knife-lanyard, a lock of hair from which the curl had not quite departed ... ghost of a day when perhaps the old man did ”hold with” women. At length he found what he wanted, a soiled sheet of paper that had been folded and refolded many times.

”Here!” he said, and extended it to Selby. It was a printed form, discoloured with age, printed in old-fashioned type, and appeared to relate to details of prison routine and the number of prisoners victualled. Selby turned it over: on the back, drawn in ink that was now faded and rusty, was a clumsy arrow showing the points of the compass; beneath that a number of oblong figures arranged haphazard and enclosed by a line. One of the figures was marked with a cross.

”That’s a cemetery,” said the old man; ”cemetery at a place called Port des Reines.” He lay silent for a while, as if trying to arrange his scattered ideas; presently the weak voice started again.

”There’s a prison at Trinidad, and my father was a warder there ... long time ago: time the old *Calypso* was out on the station....” He talked slowly, with long pauses. ”They was sent to catch a murderer who was hidin’ among the islands—a half-breed: pirate he must ha’ been ... murderer an’ I don’t know what not.... They caught him an’ they brought him to Trinidad where my father was warder in the prison ... when I was little....” The old man broke off into disconnected, rambling whispers, and the shadows began gathering in the corners of the room. A thrush in the orchard outside sang a few long, sweet notes of its Angelus and was silent. Selby waited with his chin resting in his hand. The old man suddenly turned his head: ”She ain’t comin’——? She an’ her fussin’...? I’ve got something important——”

”No, no,” said Selby soothingly, ”there’s no one here but me. And you wanted to tell me about your father——”

”Warder in the prison at Trinidad,” said the old man, ”my father was, an’ a kind-hearted man. There was a prisoner there, a pirate an’ murderer he was, what the *Calypso* caught ... an’ father was kind to him before he was hanged ... I can’t say what he did, but bein’ kind-hearted naturally, it might have been anything ... not takin’ into account of him being a pirate an’ murderer. Jewels he

had, an' rings an' such things hidden away somewhere; an' before he was hanged he told my father where they was buried, 'cos father was kind to him before he was hanged.... Port des Reines cemetery ... in the grave what's marked on that chart, he'd buried the whole lot. Seventy thousand pounds, he said...."

There was a long silence. "Father caught the prison fever an' died just afterwards. My mother, she gave me the paper ... joined the Navy: an' I never went to des Reines but the once ... then I went to the wrong cemetery to dig: ship was under sailin' orders—I hadn't time. Afterwards I heard there was two cemeteries: priest at Martinique told me. I was never there but the once.... Seventy thousand pounds: an' me slippin' me cable...."

Selby sat by the bed in the darkening room holding the soiled sheet of paper in his hand, piecing together bit by bit the fragments of this remarkable narrative, until he had a fairly connected story in his head.

Summed up, it appeared to amount to this: A pirate or murderer had been captured by a man-of-war, taken to Trinidad prison to be tried, and there sentenced to death. "Time the old *Calypso* was out on the Station." ... That would be in the 'forties or thereabouts. The old man's father had been a warder in Trinidad prison at the time, and had performed some service or kindness to the prisoner, in exchange for which the condemned felon had given him a clue to the whereabouts of his plunder. It was apparently buried in a grave in Port des Reines cemetery, but the warder had died before he could verify this valuable piece of information. His son, the ex-Gunner, had actually been to a cemetery at Port des Reines, but had gone to the wrong one, and did not find out his mistake till after the ship had sailed. The plunder was valued at £70,000.

Selby turned the paper over and folded it up. "What do you wish me to do with this, Mr Tyelake? Have you any relations or next-of-kin? It seems to me——"

The old man shook his head faintly. "I've got no relatives alive—nor friends. They're all dead ... an' I'm dyin'. That's for you, that there bit of paper. Keep it, it's to your advantage.... Some day, maybe, you'll go to Port des Reines, an' it's the old cemetery furthest from the sea. I went to the wrong one time I was there."

"But," said Selby, half-amused, half-incredulous, "I—I'm a total stranger to you.... If all this was true——"

"You keep it," said the old man. His voice was very spent and scarcely raised above a whisper. "I meant it for the first Navy-man that came along. You came, an' you were kind to me. It's yours—an' to your advantage...."

There was silence again in the little room, and Selby sat on in the dusk, wondering how much of the story was true, or whether it was all the hallucination of a failing mind; but the old man had given him the paper, and he would keep it as a memento, ... and the fact of its being a prison-form seemed to bear out

some of the details; anyhow, the story was very interesting. He rose and lit the lamp; the old man had slipped off into an easy doze, with his pathetic collection of treasures still lying in a heap on the quilt; Selby replaced them in the ditty-box, and put the box back where he had found it; the piece of paper that had been a prison-form he put in his pocket-book. As he was leaving, the woman who had been there earlier in the day made her appearance.

Selby wished her good evening, told her the old man was dozing, and passed down the path. "I'll come again to-morrow," he added at the gate. But that night the old man died, and the next morning, having ascertained from the vicar that there was nothing he could do to help, Selby shouldered his knapsack and struck out once more along the road that led up on to the moor.

II.

It was tea-time, and the Mess had gathered round the Wardroom table; a signal-man came down from the upper deck and pinned a signal on the baize-covered notice-board.

"Hullo," said some one, "signal from the Flagship! What's the news?"

The Assistant Paymaster, who was sitting with his back to the notice-board, relinquished the jam-pot, and tilting up his chair, scrutinised the paper over his shoulder. "Flag-General: Let fires die out. Usual leave may be granted to Officers."

The Major of Marines, who had finished his tea, rose from the table and tucked the novel he had been reading under his arm. "Thanks very much," he said, "now we're all happy." He stared out through the rain-smeared scuttle at an angry grey sea and lowering sky. "I can see a faint blur on the horizon—would that be the delectable beach we're invited to repair to?"

"That's it," said the First Lieutenant, stirring the leaves in his tea-pot with the spoon. He had just spent three-quarters of an hour on the forecastle, mooring ship in a cold, driving rain. "It's not more than three miles away, and it's only blowing about half a gale—there's a cutter to go ashore in; time some of you young bloods were climbing into your 'civvy'[#] suits."

[#] Lowerdeckese = Civilian.

"So much for the joys of a big Fleet in the North Sea. I'd like to bring some of

these fellows, who are always writing to the papers about it, for a little yachting trip," grumbled the Fleet Surgeon, who had just returned from two successively placid commissions in the West Indies. "Never anchor in sight of land—always blowing, always raining; never get ashore, and when you do, you wish you were on board again.... It's the limit."

"Well, thank Heaven for a fire and an arm-chair, anyway," said the Paymaster, and drifted towards the smoking-room, filling his pipe as he went.

"Who'll make a four at Bridge?" asked the Major. "Come on, Number One," and so the Mess dispersed, some to arm-chairs round the fire, others to the Bridge-table, others again to write letters in their cabins.

About half an hour before dinner, as was his wont, the Captain came down from his cabin and joined the group round the smoking-room fire. The occupants of the arm-chairs made room and smiled greetings.

"Hullo," said the Captain, "none of you ashore! Thought you all came into the Navy to see life!"

The Commander laughed. "We're beginning to forget there is such a thing as the beach."

The Captain lit a cigarette. "Not a bad principle either—saves your plain-clothes from wearing out." He settled down in an arm-chair somebody had vacated. "Like an old Gunner of a small ship I was in once in the West Indies; he only went ashore three times during the commission—once at Trinidad, and once at Bermuda, and each time when he returned he had to be hoisted on board in a bowline." There was a general laugh. "What about the third time, sir?" asked the Engineer Commander.

"Third time—ah, that was rather mysterious. We never discovered why he did go ashore that day. I don't know now." The Mess scented a yarn; thrice-blessed was their Captain in that he could tell a yarn.

"We were cruising round that fringe of islands, part of the Windward Group, showing the Flag, and the Skipper decided to look in at a place called ... h'm'm. Can't remember what it's called—Port des something ... Port des Reines, that's it,—what did you say, Selby?"

"Nothing, sir, go on..."

"The last place ever made, this Port des Reines, and it's not finished yet—just a mountain and the remains of an old French settlement. Well, we anchored off this God-forsaken hole, and as soon as the Skipper had had a look at it he decided to up killick and out of it; as far as I can remember he had to go and lunch with the Consul, but he was to come off in a couple of hours' time; so we banked fires, and off went the Captain in the galley.

"No sooner had he gone than the Gunner—this funny old boy I've been telling you about—came to my cabin (I was by way of being First Lieutenant of

that ship—we'd no Commander) and asked for leave to go ashore.

"I was rather startled: couldn't imagine what on earth he wanted to do. I told him we were under sailing orders, and only staying a couple of hours, and that it was an awful hole: had he any friends staying there, I asked him. No, he said, he had no friends there, but he particularly wanted to land there for an hour or so on urgent private affairs, as he called it.

"Well, he seemed in rather a stew about something, so I gave him leave and lowered a boat. Off he went in his old bowler hat (he always went ashore in a bowler hat and a blue suit) armed with something wrapped up in paper; this turned out afterwards to be a sort of pick or jemmy he had got the blacksmith to make for him a couple of days before; that must have been when he heard the ship was going to Port des Reines; it was the only clue we ever had.

"Two hours later, at the expiration of his leave, he returned, looking very dusty and dejected, and reported himself. I chaffed him a bit about going ashore, but nothing could I get out of him, and he never volunteered an explanation to any one, as far as I know."

A Lieutenant who had finished playing Bridge and had joined the group of listeners round the fire leaned forward suddenly.

"D'you remember his name, sir?"

"No," said the Captain, "can't say I do. Never can remember names."

"Not a Mr Tyelake by any chance, sir?"

The Captain threw away the end of his cigarette and turned towards the speaker. "Good Lord! Yes, that was it—Tyelake. But look here, Selby,——"

The Lieutenant rose and walked towards the door. "If you'll wait a second, sir, I'll show you why he went ashore." He left the mess and returned with a soiled sheet of paper in his hand; it was creased by much folding and discoloured with age.

The Captain turned it over and examined it. "But this doesn't explain much, does it? And how do you come to know old Tyelake? All this happened twelve—fifteen—nearly twenty years ago, and he was pensioned soon after. And anyhow, what's this got to do with it?"

"That," Selby turned the paper over, "that's the cemetery at Port des Reines, sir,"—and then he told them of a walking tour in the West Country (omitting the reason for it and other superfluous details) some two years before, and of the old man who had since solved, it is to be hoped to his satisfaction, his religious perplexities.

The Assistant Paymaster removed his glasses and blinked excitedly, as was his habit when much moved. "But ... why couldn't he find it when he went ashore? And why didn't——"

"Because he went to the wrong cemetery; there were two, d'you see, and he

dug up the wrong one and didn't find out there was another one till after they'd sailed. He never went there again."

"No," said the Captain. "That's right, we didn't."

The First Lieutenant laughed. "But just imagine him in that climate, tearing off the tombstones in his bowler hat and serge suit, with one eye on his watch all the time, and only finding coffins...!"

"And then hearing when it was too late that he'd backed the wrong horse," added the Major of Marines.

"But...." began the A.P. again, "*How* much did you say? Seventy thousand pounds! My Aunt! Selby, have *you* been there yet?"

Selby smiled and shook his head. "I? No, I've been 'Channel-groping' ever since; in fact, I'd forgotten all about it until the Captain mentioned Port des Reines. He was a very old man, and his wits were failing——"

The Engineer Commander examined the plan. "But there may be something in the yarn, Selby. It seems almost worth while——"

"A treasure hunt!" broke in the A.P. "Let's all put in for a couple of months' half-pay, and go out there! Hire a schooner, like they do in books."

"Schooner!" ejaculated the Major. "I can see myself setting sail for the Antilles in a schooner! Ugh! It makes me feel queer to think of it!"

"You'd look fine in a red smuggler's cap and thigh-boots, Major," said the First Lieutenant. "That's what treasure-hunters always wear."

"With a black patch over one eye, and the skull and cross-bones embroidered on your brisket," supplemented an imaginative Watch-keeper. "'Yo! ho! and a bottle of rum!'—can't you see yourself, Major? Only you ought to have a wooden leg."

"Has anybody in the Mess ever been there?" inquired the Commander.

"Why, the P.M.O.'s just come home from the West Indies; where is he?"

At that moment the Fleet Surgeon entered, to be assailed by a volley of questions.

"P.M.O.! You're just the man! Where's Porte des Reines?"

"We're all going treasure-hunting in a schooner with the Major!"

"With the Jolly Roger at the fore!"

"P.M.O., have you ever been to Porte des Reines?"

"How many cemeteries are there there?"

"What's the law about digging up graves in the West Indies?"

"——And treasure trove?"

The Fleet Surgeon looked a little bewildered. "What are you all talking about? Porte des Reines? Yes, I've been there. I don't know about the cemeteries, but I've got some photographs of the place, if you're all so anxious to see it—they're in my cabin."

He left the Mess, and the storm of conjecture and speculation broke out afresh.

”I shall chuck the Service and buy a farm,” said the First Lieutenant, ”with my share.”

”S-sh! Don’t make such a row! One of the Servants will hear, and we don’t want it to get all over the ship! These things are much better kept quiet. If there’s anything in it, the fewer——”

The A.P.’s voice rose above the turmoil: ”An’ I shall buy a cycle-car ... and a split-cane, steel-centred grilse-rod ... *and* go to Switzerland next winter—I——”

The Fleet Surgeon reappeared with a bulky album under his arm; he laid it on the card-table and turned the pages. ”Now—there’s Port des Reines: what’s left of it after the earthquake.”

”Earthquake!” The Mess gathered round and leaned breathlessly over the table.

”Yes; two years ago they had that awful earthquake, and the mountain shifted almost bodily; there’s a million tons of rock on top of—well, you can see!”

They scanned the scene of desolation in silence. ”It swallowed the whole town,” said some one in awestruck tones. The magnitude of a calamity had somehow never come home to them before quite so forcibly.

”Yes,” replied the Fleet Surgeon calmly. ”Town, such as it was, and church and cemeteries, mountain toppled down on top of them!”

There was a long, tense silence. ”But——” began the A.P., still clinging to his dreams of a split-cane grilse-rod with a steel centre.

”*Dry* up!” snapped the First Lieutenant irritably.

”Oh Death, where is thy sting!” murmured the Major of Marines. ”Seventy thousand pounds buried under a mountain!”

The Captain rang the bell and ordered a sherry and bitters. ”Well,” he said, ”thank Heaven I know at last why the Gunner went ashore!”

THE END.

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